

BV
199
W6
T4

DEVOTIONAL PROGRAMS
FOR THE
CHANGING SEASONS

Ruth C. Ikerman



 ABINGDON PRESS NEW YORK • NASHVILLE

THEOLOGY LIBRARY CLAREMONT, CALIF.

DEVOTIONAL PROGRAMS FOR THE CHANGING SEASONS

Copyright © MCMLVIII by Abingdon Press

All rights in this book are reserved.

No part of the book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the publishers except brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews. For information address Abingdon Press, Nashville 2, Tennessee.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 58:10459

Meditations previously published are copyright © 1949 by the American Baptist Publication Society; 1953 by the Christian Board of Publication; 1951, 1952, 1956, 1957 by the Christian Herald Assoc.; 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958 by David C. Cook Publishing Co.; 1955 by Light and Life Press, 1955, 1956, 1957 by the *Los Angeles Times*; 1955, 1956, 1957 by the Salvation Army, Inc.

SET UP, PRINTED, AND BOUND BY THE
PARTHENON PRESS, AT NASHVILLE,
TENNESSEE, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PREFACE

You will find the programs in this book arranged in four sections, with ten programs for each of the seasons or quarters of the year. Each has pertinent scripture passage, leader's introduction, seasonal material to read aloud, closing prayer.

May you find new blessing in service as you turn the pages of this book, whether you are reading it to some loved one who may be ill, to strangers at a club meeting in a new community, on far-distant mission field, or in the familiar monthly meeting of your long-attended church circle.

This book is dedicated to three generations of women who bless my life: my mother, Sophie Doll Percival; my brother's wife, Fleeta Mae; and my two nieces Roberta Lee and Beverlie Jean.

These devotions are sent into your home with a prayer for the benediction of happiness on all who form your family circle. Together may we be effective witness to the power of God's love in transforming the lives of his children in the great family of the world.

RUTH C. IKERMAN

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All the meditations in this book have appeared previously in magazines. Some have been adapted for book publication. Included as additional material are the scripture passages, introductions, and prayers.

Appreciation is here expressed to the following publishers:

To *Adult Bible Class* for "An Authority on Valentines," "At the End of the Hose," "Enjoy Each Christmas," "Fifty-two Sundays a Year," "Growing in Disturbed Places," "The Happy Dress," "Heirlooms for What?" "My Church," "My Neighbor's Rose," "Saying Thank You," "A Time to Pray," "Where the Ground Is the Hardest," and "Where There's Life."

To *Christian Herald* for "Easter Heritage," "Gift for the New Year," "My Year of No Giving," "The Poetry of Eternity," "Star Light, Star Bright," "Seven Notes of Gratitude," and "Thanks for the Book."

To *Hearthstone* for "The Displaced Dollars."

To *Light and Life Evangel* for "The Unknown Voice."

To *Los Angeles Times Home Magazine* for "The Best Bouquet," "A Difficult Farewell," "Family Secrets," "A Gift for the Spirit," "A House Becomes of Age," and "Let the Yarn Fall Loosely."

To *New Century Leader* for "God Bless the Parsonage" and "An Orange for Christmas."

DEVOTIONAL PROGRAMS FOR THE CHANGING SEASONS

To *The Quiet Hour* for "The Changing Seasons."

To *The War Cry* for "When You Meet a Wall," "Our Choices," "Psalm for the Sorrowing," "Safe in the Harbor," "Shelf Space," "Tools of His Trade," and "When You Meet a Wall."

To *Young People* for "Highway Comradeship" and "Storm."

CONTENTS

WINTER (*January, February, March*)

1	Gift for the New Year	13
2	A Time to Pray	17
3	Shelf Space	20
4	My Church	22
5	An Authority on Valentines	25
6	Storm	30
7	Family Secrets	32
8	Growing in Disturbed Places	35
9	When You Meet a Wall	37
10	A House Becomes of Age	40

SPRING (*April, May, June*)

11	The Best Bouquet	47
12	Our Choices	49
13	Where the Ground Is the Hardest	52
14	Easter Heritage	54
15	Psalm for the Sorrowing	59
16	The Broken Pitcher	65
17	Gift for the Spirit	68
18	God Bless the Parsonage	70

DEVOTIONAL PROGRAMS FOR THE CHANGING SEASONS

19	Heirlooms for What?	76
20	The Poetry of Eternity	79

SUMMER (*July, August, September*)

21	Star Light, Star Bright	87
22	My Neighbor's Rose	91
23	Fifty-two Sundays a Year	93
24	Where There's Life	98
25	The Happy Dress	101
26	Let the Yarn Fall Loosely	106
27	Highway Comradeship	109
28	At the End of the Hose	111
29	Tools of His Trade	114
30	A Difficult Farewell	116

FALL (*October, November, December*)

31	Safe in the Harbor	123
32	My Year of No Giving	125
33	The Unknown Voice	131
34	The Changing Seasons	134
35	Saying Thank You	137
36	Seven Notes of Gratitude	139
37	The Displaced Dollars	143
38	An Orange for Christmas	147
39	Enjoy Each Christmas	151
40	Thanks for the Book	154



WINTER

1. GIFT FOR THE NEW YEAR

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Ps. 90:1-12

"Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." (Vs. 2.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Each New Year we are probably more acutely aware of the swift passage of time than in any period of the changing seasons. While we are busy planning all that we hope to do in the months ahead, it is easy to get lost in the details of committee meetings and routine duties to be recorded in yearly reports. Today's meditation reminds that above these transient duties there are everlasting values of time.

Gift for the New Year

When the children from across the street handed me the package, they said, "Three guesses what it is." Eagerly they waited, eyes shining, while I pinched, shook, and sniffed the little white package tied with a narrow red ribbon.

"We looked and we looked and we looked," said the five-year-old girl with her curls a-bobbing.

WINTER

Her sober seven-year-old brother said, "We wanted it to be just right."

"We'll tell you just one thing about it," they agreed. "This gift will never wear out. *It will last forever.*"

So I ventured my three adult guesses: "A diamond locket in a ruby setting?" Giggles greeted the answer. "A knife with an ivory handle?" They shook their heads at my colossal ignorance. "Maybe a little book with poetry inside?" They called me a silly.

So I opened the package, determined to hide my disappointment if I found some new kitchen gimmick which would break before I could use it even once. Instead my fingers drew from the folds of paper a beautiful desk calendar of red leather.

There were cardboard pieces with markings for the seven days of the week, with numerals up to thirty-one. But it took only digits zero to nine to mark off the years, for these could be shifted in many combinations.

"See, what did we tell you?" the children said gleefully. "It will last forever. And when we're all grown up, you can still remember us. You said yourself the calendar will never wear out."

Then I remembered the day they had come to me with a mouth-filling word called "everlasting," and demanded to know what it meant. Because I had been busy, I had tossed off a reply, "Oh, it's like time—the calendar just goes on forever."

GIFT FOR THE NEW YEAR

Then they had wanted to know whether a man who had more money than anybody else in the world could buy a day with more than twenty-four hours in it, and I had assured them that rich and poor had the same amount of time in God's great democracy. I stifled the impulse to tell them that neither could a man buy less than twenty-four hours in any one day, hoping that sorrow would touch them so lightly that never in a whole long lifetime would they need to think of that question. We had agreed that morning that the calendar was a wonderful invention, helping us to keep track of time, and that in the kind of world in which we live, man will always need such a record of the days and seasons.

I could visualize the number of weeks it had taken for them to save enough from their weed-pulling and errand-running to buy the perpetual desk calendar. And even more, I appreciated their thoughtfulness. The children watched with pride as I placed the red calendar on my desk.

Throughout the years that calendar on my desk has spoken to me of many things. It has offered its variety of days with impartial dignity, playing the symphony of season sounds: wild birdcalls, wedding music, football whistles, Christmas bells. It has reminded me to frost a birthday cake and bake banana bread for tea.

The calendar speaks now of the day in which time ran out for the seven-year-old-plus-fifteen, when he shifted from time to space in a fighter plane out over Korea. The

WINTER

letter which told what could be learned of his last flight contained a picture of his sister, her curls trimly tucked under her probationary nurse's cap.

But as I use their gift for another year, I shall remember their faith that time is everlasting. And I shall try to use the minutes and hours for those things which are not fleeting but eternal.

Turning the cardboard numerals to a confused and transient new year, I say again the same prayer that was in my heart the day the children brought my gift: "Dear God, thank you for the promise of a new year. For as much of it as may be granted me, give me wisdom to use best that great and priceless gift—time." I will remember the reassuring words of the psalmist, "From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." (90:2.)

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, accept our thanks for the great gift of time. As we look forward to another year of service together, let it be with humility and gratitude to thee for giving us the hours of our days. So may we use them to thy glory as we serve within our homes, churches, and communities, lending Christian influence to the world. *Amen.*

2. A TIME TO PRAY

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Heb. 4:9-16

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Vs. 16.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

How to find time to do all the interesting things which present themselves in any new year is one of the chief problems in setting up a personal or group schedule. Sometimes in the anxiety to include all the worth-while activities, something even more important is left out of the calendar. For a time for prayer and meditation is one of the most valuable periods of any day, adding richness to the week and making a cherished remembrance when the year is ended. Our meditation today concerns the practical matter of finding a time to pray.

A Time to Pray

"Sometimes I get so busy with the housework I have no time for devotions or to pray for others," said a harried church worker who is constantly called upon to perform many activities within the church.

WINTER

In reply, a friend known for her serenity of spirit and graciousness of manner said, "But in housework you have one of the best opportunities of all to pray."

This friend, who is often called upon to furnish help to others who have difficult problems to face, confessed that she had learned to pray certain prayers when doing certain household tasks.

"What better place is there to pray than on your knees scrubbing the kitchen floor?" she asked. Ruefully she added, "It's a task I don't like to do, and it sometimes makes me irritable. So I have learned to use that time to pray about some of the things in life which make me angry. The harder I scrub, the harder I pray that the evils of war, poverty, alcohol, may be abolished."

She had her time for gentler prayers too. "Out in the garden cutting flowers there sometimes comes over me a feeling that this is the time to say a prayer of thanksgiving for the companionship of God in my daily activities. It's like the poem which tells how God walks in the garden, even as he did with Adam and Eve."

She had learned to concentrate on problems of health in such an intimate occurrence as supervising the daily baths of the children. Seeing their firm legs, she was reminded of the friend who was trying so hard to learn to walk with crutches following an automobile accident. There was no better time than this to pray in faith for her friend's recovery.

Her testimony suggests a means for other homemakers to help combat some of the fatigue they feel at being bound up with tasks, and finding no "proper" time for devotions or practicing a prayer life.

For by praying for others in the round of the daily routine, new strength flows into the homemaker for the continuing of her own duties with less tenseness. There is always time to pray if the heart is attuned with thankfulness for blessings and aware of the needs of the world.

PRAYER

O God, thou dost have all eternity, and we have such a short span of time on this earth. Keep us from squandering it on activities which have no continuing value. Lend us wisdom to view earthly projects with the eyes of eternity, for when we glimpse them so, we will desire with all our hearts to find sufficient time for companionship with thee through prayer. *Amen.*

3. SHELF SPACE

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Phil. 4:1-9

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (Vs. 8.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Early in each year many stores take inventory. It is true that in our homes as we start out with firm intentions to keep possessions tidy and in good order, we take a good look at the condition of the shelves in our cupboards and closets. As we prepare to live our daily experiences in the new year, it is well also to give a good straight look at the condition of the shelf space within our hearts. Today's meditation is designed to help us keep our hearts in good order, ready for the activities of our churches and communities.

Shelf Space

When business houses take inventory, they assign a certain cash value to the shelves on which their merchandise

is stored. Because this has a definite place in the listing of financial assets, it becomes essential to use it wisely.

Clerks in many stores are instructed to keep a sharp eye on merchandise which has not moved swiftly. This is marked down and sold to make better use of the valuable shelf space. In some instances material will be ordered destroyed or given away rather than have it accumulate on the shelf.

Thinking of this in relation to my own kitchen cupboard always causes me to get busy and use some of the packaged mixes on the shelf or to add variety to the family diet by using a product bought some time ago and left untouched.

If this is a wise policy in the material world, how much more true it is in the world of the spirit and the heart. Lately I have asked myself, "How much space am I taking up on the shelf of my heart with unworthy objects?"

The space in my heart certainly is valuable, for it is the part of me which beckons to eternity. If it is cluttered with useless packages of fear, hatred, bitterness, resentment, unfriendliness, or selfishness, it is placing my life in the balance sheet showing loss instead of profit.

To be used to best advantage, the shelf space of my heart must be filled with packages of cheerfulness, faith, fortitude, patience, a zest for living. Every so often I take inventory of the shelf space of my heart.

WINTER

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, whatever this year holds for us, may we never become so busy that we do not have time to look within and see the condition of our own hearts. Help us remember that in dealing with a confused world, we can bring to it the blessing of peace only in proportion as our own hearts have found that peace. Give us grace to place our hearts in good working order that we may serve thee by helping others. *Amen.*

4. MY CHURCH

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Luke 4:14-21

“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.” (Vs. 16.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

It is well that early in the year occur the birthdays of two leaders of our nation, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. For this focuses the attention of citizens on the rich heritage of blessings stretching from the time of the birth of our nation even to the time of man's reaching

out into space toward other planets. Today our meditation considers the important place in the history of progress played by the beloved institution of the church.

My Church

My friend was annoyed because I had just refused to join a new social group and had given lack of time as my reason. She noted that I always found "time for the church."

Yes, it is because my time is so limited that I do keep my interest in the church. For the church multiplies my time almost miraculously. In the church on Sunday mornings time is not only spent in worship, but in education through the timely news approach of the sermon. Inspiration comes from the reading of the Bible.

Music enters the hour with its blessing of harmony. When the offering plate is passed, my contribution starts an interesting journey to faraway places where it will help missionaries I may never see with my own eyes. The jingle of my coin will someday mingle with the sound of foreign languages, the screech of tropical birds, or the laughter of children in a mission school.

I keep a sustained interest in the church because it was interested in me even before my birth. By supporting hospitals, it insured better care for all children. Later its consistent interest in education led to the bettering of schools.

WINTER

The church maintains its interest in my welfare by trying to keep out of the state the worst elements of the factions which try to encourage liquor and gambling.

By fostering interest in visiting the sick and shut-in, the church enables me to go further than my own interest in remembering individuals whom so many forget.

And it brings me in weekly contact with sincere hard-working men and women who try to carry their own burdens cheerfully and at the same time reach out a helping hand to a neighbor.

Yes, the church multiplies my time, for as one source it serves my multiple needs. It is a part of a rich heritage of fellowship. For Jesus himself went into the church of his day "as his custom was."

PRAYER

God of our fathers, we are grateful for all the blessings which make up our religious and national heritage. Help us to remember that we must be vigilant to keep such blessings and that one way we can do so is by being faithful to the church of our choice. Grant us wisdom to see that the church of the world can be strong only in proportion as we give of our time and talent to the church in our community. *Amen.*

5. AN AUTHORITY ON VALENTINES

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: John 15:9-17

"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." (Vs. 12.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Valentine Day is one of the calendar's happy holidays. In our meditation today we hear a story about two people who knew that the power of love can fashion each of us into an "authority on valentines."

An Authority on Valentines

He was standing by the stationery counter when I first noticed him. Picking up a large red heart surrounded with lacy, white frilled paper, he read the verse through seriously. Then he laid it aside, much as an executive completing the chairman's annual report.

His fingers lifted a white satin heart covered with embroidered purple violets. He raised it to his face to smell the sachet as if searching for some well-remembered fragrance. Turning it over, he checked the price tag on the back.

Slowly he reached for a smaller one, square in shape

WINTER

but bearing an elaborately embossed design. A frown crossed his face.

Next he turned to the comic ones, and I heard a chuckle as he read one I had just laid aside. It said, "Kid, you are my atomic rocket."

His amused eyes met mine as he said, "I wonder what my wife would do if I took that one home to her."

We agreed that with all the assortment from which to choose, it was still hard to find the right valentine sentiment. His white hair and mustache shook vigorously as he said, "It certainly is in my case."

When he did not elaborate, I did not ask him, although a valentine counter seemed conducive to confession. Nor did I ever expect to know what he meant by his last remark. But it happened that I did learn.

That very week two new names were given me by the calling committee of the church, and I sallied forth to look up the address. It proved to be a modest house on a side street near medical offices. Who should come to the door but my acquaintance of the valentine counter.

"Well, well," he said, "did you find the right hearts and flowers?"

Consumed with curiosity, I stepped inside to meet his wife. In a wheel chair sat the loveliest woman I had seen in a long while. Her pink blouse had both lace and ribbon bows. Her short hair was held back by a sparkling comb.

Instantly I recognized this couple as retired, winter vis-

itors, seeking the solace of California sunshine for the pain of bodily ailments.

"It's so nice of you to come," said a soft voice; "I do miss church, and it's hard to get my good husband to go alone."

She turned to him, "See, you did go, and now we have this visitor."

Skillfully she turned the wheel chair with a movement from her elbow. "I'll just light the fire for a cup of tea," she said, darting away like a youngster on a prized scooter.

A warning nod from her husband kept me from protesting. Plainly she had been hoping for such an opportunity. From the desk he took a picture of two children and said with pride, "We miss our grandchildren so much."

Beside them was the framed picture of a man in military uniform, and I blurted, "So this is your son and their father."

The man turned away as he spoke one word: "Corregidor."

Back through the kitchen doorway came the wheel chair, and his wife said: "We've always wanted to spend the winter here. But we didn't know it would take an automobile accident and these bad feet of mine to do it."

We talked about the weather, flowers, where to buy fresh fruits. By now the kettle was boiling, and we went to a low table already set for their evening meal. The hostess sent her husband for a blue cup with golden trim

WINTER

to match her teapot. She explained, "When he wasn't looking, I smuggled a few of my favorite pieces into our trunk to entertain company this winter."

Yes, she had brought the cooky plate with its garland of pink and blue posies, and the vase with hand-painted daffodils. My eye glanced beyond the potted plants and scenic post cards on the magazine table, searching for some trace of a valentine, but there was none in sight.

It was time for me to leave with a promise to come again soon. As I stood at the opened door, a haunting fragrance of perfume came from the wheel chair as the hostess lifted a slender arm in farewell.

The host walked down the sidewalk with me. He stopped beside a newly planted rose tree and said: "We just rent this place of course, but I decided to buy a quick-blooming rose instead of a flossy valentine. She loves roses. They used to say at home she could talk to her garden and make the flowers grow. We'll watch this one while we are here this winter, and then whoever is here another season can enjoy it then."

Remembering the stacks of valentine cards, I mused aloud, "So with all those written messages you didn't find the proper sentiment on a card after all." Silently I thought to myself, "What would you say on a valentine if you had an invalid wife, an only son dead in war, orphaned grandchildren, a small income, only a few remaining years?" Now here was a situation to cause a professional greeting-

AN AUTHORITY ON VALENTINES

card writer to chew his pencil clear down to the eraser. But I had added up only the grim facts, reckoning without the power of the love which launches valentines.

"No, I didn't find a written valentine," answered my host. "But after all I'm fussy, for I'm an authority on valentines."

He opened the garden gate leading from the ordinary-looking house to my car at the curb. Then looking back toward the window where his wife smiled at us, he raised his hand in a gesture of tribute as he repeated: "Yes, I'm an authority. Why, for nearly fifty years now I have been lucky enough to live with a valentine."

PRAYER

We ask thy help, God, in giving our homes the loving spirit of valentines. Grant that we may show forth thy love in our dealings day by day with those closest to us in the home and with all others we meet in life's routine. *Amen.*

6. STORM

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Gen. 9:8-17

“And I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.” (Vs. 15.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

The winter months are noted for their storms. Today's meditation looks at them from the point of view of the Christian attitude toward the stormy problems in today's confused international picture.

Storm

“It took me a long time to learn that those who never venture outside in bad weather never learn the glory of the storm.”

A Christian counselor made this confession to a young man who was caught in a storm of disapproval over his stand for what he considered a righteous cause.

Tourists crossing the Western deserts are amazed to find that though they may be in the midst of a sudden and

heavy rainstorm, ahead it is perfectly possible to see the brilliant sunshine, like burnished gold on the windshield.

Among the worst storms are the sandstorms when small pieces of sand can remove entire coats of automobile paint more thoroughly than many laborers using sandpaper for several days. Yet even in such heavy sandstorms the driver can see through the brown sand an unusual pink reflection where the sun is shining beyond the wall of dust.

Seasoned motorists have learned the tricks of "keeping on" and riding ahead of a storm or of speeding out of it. Even if one is caught in a heavy storm for several hours as he moves progressively with it, there are compensations. He sees unusual cloud formations and feels a humbling awareness at the amount of rainfall which can materialize from the grayness accompanied by the wind.

Inside one hears the fearful sound of the wind around the edge of the house and rooftop. Outside in the middle of the storm the traveler senses as well as hears its long, generous, rushing sweep across the waste places, bringing rain for the crops and fresh air to combat disease.

The familiar reminder since the days of Noah of seeing the rainbow break through the clouds grows hackneyed when read by the fireplace inside. One knows the miracle anew by sharing its blessing out of doors after battling the storm.

The world today is filled with people who are content to sit inside and listen fearfully to the storm raging outside.

WINTER

It remains for the Christian to travel hopefully through the storms of the current era, remembering that God provides even in the midst of the storm certain blessings of beauty and insight denied to those who never seek to know the glory of the storm.

PRAYER

Forgive us our fears, dear God, as we live our lives in this storm-tossed period of history. Help us stand firm against the winds of Communism and materialism. Let us have the joy of thy companionship in braving whatever stormy days appear in our own lives. *Amen.*

7. FAMILY SECRETS

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: I John 3:18-24

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth." (Vs. 18.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

The longer evenings of winter often provide the members of a family with an opportunity for enjoying rich compan-

ionship. The family circle includes the pets to which we give our hearts as we watch them grow and develop. Today's meditation takes its theme from an experience one family shared when its beloved pet was temporarily lost from home.

Family Secrets

The other day while browsing over a table of new books, I wished that someone would bring out a brand-new dictionary. I mean a volume containing pet phrases of the average American family interpreted for other families who might find them useful.

Compilation of such a book would mean ringing of doorbells and asking members of the family what is their particular rallying point, their battle cry of freedom.

Such question asking would surely result in the best reading of this generation, putting down in black and white the symbols with which the family today communicates. All my friends have such phrases, and they sound absurd to me.

But then they all smile or laugh at the silliness of the phrase which keeps our family spirits welded together, come happiness or sorrow. That phrase is: "Maybe Smokey is still somewhere."

And it may mean that perhaps a good-news letter will be in the mailbox, that the doctor's report will be a satisfac-

WINTER

tory one, that the proper part will be found to fix the automobile, that there may even be an income tax refund.

"Maybe Smokey is still somewheres" has assumed a family symbolism far removed from its origin. As anyone can see, the phrase refers to the lost family pet. He had been gone for three days and four nights, this adored member of the family. Every alleyway and nearby house had been searched, telescopes had been trained on treetops, telephone calls had produced no response.

We were about to remove the dish of milk and the plate of food from their accustomed spot when the youngest member of the family protested with the phrase "maybe Smokey is still somewheres." And at that instant Smokey appeared, home from his wanderings overjoyed to see us, delighted to find his food ready for him.

The phrase worked happily in bringing back the family pet. It is used now as a phrase of hope for all sorts of apparent impossibilities.

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, we are grateful for the joys of the family circle, and that this may include the pets which show us clearly that we are all thy children. We cherish the special family secrets which make our days together happy and bright. Help us always to remember that the one universal language of thy children everywhere is that which is spoken in acts of love and kindness. *Amen.*

8. GROWING IN DISTURBED PLACES

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Ps. 126:1-6

"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." (Vs. 6.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

One of the marks of progress in a nation or community is the building of new roads. Sometimes this means that in all kinds of weather the construction machinery must keep busy making new trails across what formerly were pastures and hillsides. Beneath the disturbed soil sleep the seeds which when weather permits will come to life to blossom and restore the area to nature's beauty. From this familiar sight along our highways comes our devotional theme today.

Growing in Disturbed Places

When big bulldozers cut through a western mountain-side for a new road, they take the foliage and trees with them. Then a little red flower called the scarlet bugler begins to grow almost immediately in the "disturbed" soil. The same thing happens after fire destroys western acreage. No wonder this stalk with its red blossoms is so admired,

WINTER

for it speaks of the courage to rise again when circumstances disturb the familiar ground of life.

Some people have this quality. They are the modest ones who come into bloom when the circumstances of life upset and disturb, offering to their friends the consolation of fellowship learned through suffering.

Such persons are the first to make a call or send a note of condolence when death comes into the home. They know which food to prepare to encourage an invalid appetite. Sometimes by the power of one spoken word they can lift the heart which is discouraged by the daily routine.

Perhaps they all but disappear from contact after the disturbed person has resumed his useful living. That is because they are busy working in some other disturbed field of activity. For always somewhere some friend or acquaintance is in difficulty.

With roots deep in the soil of faith, fed by the food of prayer, hearts grow while helping others face up to the battering conditions of life.

The hillsides of experience call for the cheerful notes of courage, such as are expressed by the scarlet bugler and other of God's creations growing serenely in disturbed places.

PRAYER

We are grateful, God, for the laws of growth which show thy loving concern for thy children everywhere. Even as the grass and shrubs and blossoms stretch out to restore

WHEN YOU MEET A WALL

that which has been disturbed, help us learn how to walk serenely in the midst of difficulty. May each of us cultivate the quality of helpfulness which can restore other hearts to usefulness. *Amen.*

9. WHEN YOU MEET A WALL

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Ps. 18:20-30

"For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall." (Vs. 29.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Winter months sometimes bring special problems of illness from changing weather conditions. Perhaps we are kept indoors until the walls of the home seem more confining than usual. It is often a time of financial planning when the church budget must be stretched to repair the furnace. For the dreary days in the life of a church or an individual there is a message in today's meditation.

When You Meet a Wall

"Since this has happened, I feel as if I were hemmed in by a wall," said my friend sadly. She had been telling me

WINTER

of her family problem and how no matter what solution she attempted, she seemed to face a wall of obstacles.

Since this was the case, we decided the thing to do was to try to think of all the ways to get over a wall. One way is to try to climb up the sides of it by sheer physical strength and endurance. But often the fingernails break and the hands become bruised or bleeding trying to cling to the rough sides.

Another way to deal with an obstacle is to take the attitude best expressed as "hitting your head against a wall." But even this obstinate determination to knock the wall down almost always fails, and the wall is victorious. Then the exhausted individual has to try, with confused brains and tired emotions, to think of a new solution.

He may try to get a foothold in material things and laboriously begin the steep climb up the wall. Usually even this practical approach does not work. There may be slipbacks to the ground when temptations appear, and then comes the necessity to try over again.

Sometimes it does seem, after repeated efforts, that walls loom as large as ever, blocking the view of accomplishment in the future. Walls can shut out views of life's dearest dreams. My friend had reason to feel discouraged when she admitted she was hemmed in by walls of defeat.

Fortunately there is a fourth way of action for the individual who meets a wall in his life. It is the way used by David and described in Ps. 18:29. There he gives as

WHEN YOU MEET A WALL

his testimony, "And by my God have I leaped over a wall." He did not climb it only to fall back; he did not batter his head against it in useless emotion; he did not allow the wall to encircle him.

Instead he relied on God, and he was able to "leap" over the wall. Apparently God provided extra energy, the necessary strength so to meet the problem that the psalmist could best describe it not as a climb or a walk or a jump, but as a "leap."

Every athlete knows the most important part of any leap is the starting position. David started his glorious leap from a humble, kneeling, prayerful position. This indicates that sometimes the best way to start to get over a wall is to get on your knees.

David's solution was open to my friend and all others who feel themselves discouraged and hemmed in by defeating walls. From a starting position on the knees in prayer can come the power to leap over any wall in life.

PRAYER

Because the walls in our lives are so very different, Lord, each of us has a different request to make. But we all need a new measure of thy power, and we are grateful for the blessed assurance that this is available to us when we ask in prayer. Give us the needed strength to leap over our individual walls of despair and regret, so that we may serve thee joyously. *Amen.*

10. A HOUSE BECOMES OF AGE

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Matt. 7:24-27

"Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock." (Vs. 24.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

It is always a happy occasion when friends can attend a housewarming, whether it be for newlyweds, recent arrivals in the community, or the opening of the new fellowship hall at the church. The presence of friends constitutes a real blessing, promising future happiness for the new dwelling place. Today our meditation concerns the momentous day when a certain house became of age after years of useful living.

A House Becomes of Age

When the telephone rang, the friend at the other end of the line said, "It is exactly twenty-one years this week end since we broke ground for this house. I hope you are free to come over and help us celebrate at supper tomorrow evening."

A HOUSE BECOMES OF AGE

Surely this house couldn't be approaching such an anniversary so soon! It took some doodling of dates on the telephone pad to convince us of the lightning speed of time. Yes, here was a house which had survived depression, prosperity, global war, pseudo peace, police action, atomic development, termites.

A celebration was definitely in order, so we accepted with pleasure this invitation in honor of a house.

Just what gift should we take a house on the day it becomes of legal voting age? Well, a tidy little payment on the mortgage might be in order in many such cases.

Maybe something we had made with our own hands—an orange-shaped pot holder for the kitchen? A vase for the dining room? Yet extra cupboards had long since been added to make room for all the knickknacks brought by friends who enjoyed this home's hospitality.

Something for the yard? Well, one thing the house might use is a sign saying "Please don't fall into the fish pond," as the preacher had done the night he performed a garden wedding ceremony ten years ago.

Maybe some candles for the table, or a lamp? But this house had always had the light of friendliness gleaming around its table and from its windows, welcoming a neighbor for a cup of tea and a slice of conversation to ease a problem or celebrate a joyous occasion.

After two whole days of cogitating between the invita-

WINTER

tion and time to leave to attend the dinner party, we had come up with just exactly nothing in the way of a good gift suggestion. So we started off to the party empty-handed, but heart-filled.

For we remembered how the crape myrtle tree had grown from a tiny potted plant into the beautiful pink umbrella. Even as we admired the new sofa top, we knew the furniture had been recovered because of stains from tears and medicine. We recalled the day the new draperies had to be replaced because the puppy developed a fondness for eating tassels.

Empty-handed we approached the welcome mat. But the house did not seem in the least disappointed at the lack of a gift to be seen. Instead it seemed to reach out welcoming arms through the pillars, and the door almost opened of itself. And as we stepped across the threshold, for nobody knows how many times in the twenty-one years, the house gave a happy little creaking sound, almost a sigh.

So we knew the house understood that after all we had brought it the best gift of all, that of friendship across the changing years of our lives. For what is any house without friends to step across its threshold?

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, we thank thee for a world which has the great blessing of earthly friendships, and for all that

A HOUSE BECOMES OF AGE

our friends mean to us. But we are aware of that greatest gift of thine own companionship. Come into our hearts anew, and go with us to our homes that they may be blessed with the radiance of thine own friendly presence. Help us to keep our hearts and our homes open to the needs of others. *Amen.*



SPRING

11. THE BEST BOUQUET

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Song of S. 2:11-16

"For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come." (Vs. 11.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Flowers play an important part in our happiness as individuals and a group. One of the most important pieces of service in an organization may be that of flower arrangement, so that the dinner tables lose their barrenness, or an altar piece immediately commands an attitude of worship. Today we consider how to help encourage this love in the children entrusted to our care.

The Best Bouquet

One of the first things the housewife learns is that a posy here and there can work wonders with a room and the family's disposition as well. From gathering geraniums to put in a discarded cheese glass she may progress eventually to an assortment of orchids in an imported vase.

Somewhere along the way she may take a course in

SPRING

flower arrangement, perhaps the beautiful symbolism of the Japanese culture.

But whichever system she uses, the housewife knows that an arrangement of flowers can serve to heighten the joy of living. She may even muse about the best bouquet of all.

Is it the one carried at high-school graduation? The nosegay arranged on the table in the corner of the inn where the man of the house proposed, or perhaps the wedding bouquet itself?

Each housewife has her own choice. But when all the choices are known and charted and polled, I feel certain the best bouquet would be the one which might defy all rules and never win any prizes for arrangement.

The other day I saw exactly such a bouquet. It included a scraggly dandelion, a California poppy which had gone to sleep immediately upon being brought indoors, and a leaf which looked as if it had been dropped from an orange tree.

Against this yellow, gold, and green there was massed a pale pink carnation and a piece of red verbena such as grows by the curb. Yet all of this had been placed in what I knew to be the housewife's favorite blue vase.

She smiled as she saw the conjecture in my face and said "There is no bouquet so beautiful as the first one a child brings into the home, preferably the first bouquet of a first grandchild."

PRAYER

For the memories of bouquets which have blessed our lives, accept our thanks, dear heavenly Father. Even as we are mindful that the beauty of the flowers is another manifestation of thy love for thy children in their earthly journey, help us share those flowers with those who may be ill or in need of a message of encouragement. Give to our lives each day some of the fresh beauty of growing loveliness as expressed in our gardens. *Amen.*

12. OUR CHOICES

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Josh. 24:14-18

"And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." (Vs. 15.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Spring house cleaning often includes a job of painting one of the rooms of the home which has become smudged with fingerprints. Or perhaps a new color is desired to give

SPRING

a lift to daily living. Sometimes the proper choice of the new colors calls for much deliberation. Today we consider how important in everyday living are the choices we are called upon to make in matters dealing with our spiritual homemaking.

Our Choices

A young woman, about to paint her first home, said to the paint salesman, "I don't know much about paint colors, so I asked a friend to choose the colors. She knows such a lot about colors, but to tell the truth I don't really like the ones she picked out."

The salesman stopped in his mixing of the paint and said, "Just who is going to be living in this house? You or your friend?"

With a little shudder the young woman said, "I am going to be living there. Wait just a minute while I show you the colors I really like."

Wisely the salesman had saved her from making a mistake she might have regretted daily by reminding her that she was the one who would be living with her choices. In painting it is easy to see the unfortunate results of such mistakes.

But the policy of allowing others to make our own choices may lead to even more disastrous although unseen results in personality or spiritual growth. Does a group of

friends choose your recreation? If so, you may find yourself spending more time in gossip than if you made your own choice.

Perhaps the question concerns a matter such as weekly church attendance. Does the gang leaving for an outing choose whether your family first attends church?

Taking a good look occasionally to see who is making the choices in your life can lead to new policies of action. A mistake in paint color can be corrected by the application of another coat of paint. A mistake in personal habit can only be corrected usually after much heartache. One way to avoid such confusion is to remember that we ourselves live with our choices.

PRAYER

It is hard, our Father, to know how to make correctly the various choices which confront us each day. So we are especially grateful for the promise of guidance from thee when we earnestly seek this direction. Humbly we ask for it now, so that whatever choice we are facing in our individual lives may be blessed by thee, leading to right action and conduct. *Amen.*

13. WHERE THE GROUND IS THE HARDEST

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: II Pet. 3:13-18

"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to him be glory both now and for ever. Amen." (Vs. 18.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Spring brings with it the promise of new gardens, but first the soil must be prepared. Sometimes we find that soil to be very hard, making the task of the gardener a discouraging one. Often in our club and church projects we come upon hard situations, calling for extra effort to bring success. Today's meditation reminds of the great possibilities for growth even where the ground is the hardest.

Where the Ground Is the Hardest

In certain parts of the Southwest, plants will grow in abundance in hedges, and with no care at all beyond an occasional drink of water. Often the little moisture which

WHERE THE GROUND IS THE HARDEST

falls from the desert sky suffices to keep the plants in good shape.

When a person examines a thriving geranium plant in one of these hedges, he may be surprised to find how hard the soil is packed around the roots. "Sometimes I think the geranium likes to work its way through ground which is packed down and hard to penetrate," an experienced gardener told me.

He was talking about the beautiful hedge he had noted when he went to take care of an old house which for years had been all but abandoned. "Those geranium plants hadn't had any human attention in years, but still they were growing. I had to cut them back. Could you use some cuttings for your garden?" he asked me.

How wonderful it was to have this offer of a gift for our new landscaping project. And from a plant with so hardy a background that it had survived without care.

All too seldom do we see anything which depends only on God's providence. Whatever rain falls from the heaven, what sun shines, the passing wind, each has its part in the life of the geranium. And how satisfying and rewarding are the results.

Such a plant is an example for all Christians, reminding us not to be handle-with-care Christians, demanding special care from the pastor, solicitude of friends over "hurt" feelings encountered in so-called Christian service.

The growing Christian accepts what God sends, and

SPRING

uses it to help make bright his own life and the lives of those with whom he comes in contact. Blessed is the man or woman who learns to grow in the soil packed hard with trouble or discouragement, whose cheerfulness is a bright blossom of hope.

PRAYER

Father, sometimes we become discouraged because of hard, bitter circumstances in our lives. When this happens, help us to remember that there are hardy blossoms which grow even in hard soil and that our lives may improve if we are firmly rooted in thy love. May our faith grow and shine as a bright blossom of courage, a symbol of hope to others. *Amen.*

14. EASTER HERITAGE

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Matt. 28:1-10

"He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." (Vs. 6.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Today our meditation tells of the Easter heritage as given to her children by a devoted Christian mother. As we listen,

perhaps we can be thinking if some of the customs and traditions of this family are adaptable in our own homes.

Easter Heritage

Each springtime my mother taught her family the eternal beauty of Easter. With cookstove for blackboard and garden for laboratory she demonstrated the truths inherent in the ageless story.

Now even a whiff of fresh rolls browning in an oven recalls our annual baking of hot cross buns. Such observance began on the Thursday evening before Good Friday. Then Mother set the yeast, which during the night performed its magic with the flour and milk.

All the pans in the kitchen were brought into use to bake the buns. We walked on tiptoe so as not to disturb a temperamental oven. Next came the fun of icing buns with frosting of powdered sugar, milk, and vanilla. Just a simple cross on top the hot bun. When this had had time to dry, delivering of buns to neighbors began in earnest.

For days ahead we had planned to whom to give the buns. One year it would be old Mr. Smith down the street who broke his hip way before Thanksgiving. And our favorite teacher, who lived in an apartment without an oven. Just imagine! Nearly always there was an emergency which added some new name to the list.

Once the grandmother of a favorite friend had come

SPRING

down with the disease about which even grownups talked in whispers a few years back, that mysterious cancer. "Why did she have to catch cancer, Mother?" we asked, remembering how good Grandma Dane had always been to us children, handing us cookies and flowers.

Well, Mother couldn't tell us why, but she managed to make us feel that when the answer is known, it will be because of wisdom revealed through researchers working hand in hand with God in a kindly universe.

And when Grandma Dane died shortly after Easter, we had been prepared for this sorrow because of our knowledge of death through the Easter story. So we were not so bereaved as if we had not been allowed to take her some hot cross buns. For even as children we sensed that we had done what we could to help alleviate pain through the comfort of fellowship.

But usually the delivering of the buns was a happy occasion. Some of these friends had little presents for us. There would be a glass dish with candy eggs from which we could take both a green and a yellow one. Or some lavender and pink sweet peas to carry home. Perhaps fresh eggs for us to boil and color.

This egg-coloring meant an expedition to the garden for mustard greens and beets, and industrious saving of old coffee grounds for golden browns. Painting eggs with the name of each individual who would be present for Easter breakfast or dinner was a part of our fun.

Colored eggs were arranged in as lifelike a nest as we could make from long grasses or carefully hoarded excelsior. In this we tried accurately to follow the nest designs of the hens. For this was before the time when eggs appeared on grocery shelves looking like synthetic products automatically produced and packed by machines into oblong boxes with cardboard partitions to keep one from touching another. An integral part of each Easter was the reminder that the hens gave eggs for breakfast and that God had made life in the form of the hens and the eggs. It was not too far a step from this knowledge to begin to learn about other forms of life and creation.

A wild-flower-gathering expedition was a part of each Easter week. We returned home in the dusty twilight with arms filled with golden poppies, purple hyacinths, yellow and white daisies, and the pinks and reds of Indian paintbrushes.

From our own garden we saved the prettiest white blossoms to use in decorating the church. Others went into bouquets for the sick and some for our own house. For Easter was a time when we picked up our playthings and made our room neat, as befitted the celebration of so important a date.

One visual means used to explain Easter to a child was our annual visit to beautiful gardens in our community, thrown open to the public. One lovely spot featured gorgeous beds of tulips which flowered near Easter. Before we

SPRING

walked to the blossoming gardens, my mother put into our hands dry brown bulbs, scaly to the touch. We found it hard to believe that the pink radiance and purple royalty of tulips could possibly come from such drab bulbs as we carried in our pockets. But in this garden was ample evidence that somehow they did.

That rugged illustration of Easter has sustained me through long philosophical discussions and lectures when my fingers have automatically reached into my coat pocket searching for the remembered reality of that long-ago bulb. And the recurring blossoming of daffodils each spring brings to me a new and endless hoard of the garden's golden coins to cherish.

Another legacy which yearly increases in value is the echo of the reading within the family circle of the actual events of that first Easter as told in the Bible. Now in my own home I take an hour each Easter week to read the exciting, exalted story summarizing events from before Palm Sunday through the trial and the tomb, beyond to the journey along Emmaus Way. As I read, I catch the remembered inflection of my mother's voice as she made that first Easter morning a part of the early sun coming through the new green leaves on our own fig tree.

Life for us all grows increasingly complex in the atomic age. It is much easier to buy a fancy basket wrapped in cellophane than to arrange an hour to read the tale of Topsy, Mopsy, and Cottontail to an entranced child. It

PSALM FOR THE SORROWING

is simpler to shop for Sonny's new Easter suit in town than to forego a crowded club schedule and stay home to answer a child's searching questions.

But when a ruffled pink organdy dress has become only a discarded dust rag, the Easter questions still remain to be answered, inevitably and ultimately Development of simple, inexpensive family traditions together in Easter week offers opportunity to mirror in the home the peace of Easter and to reflect that peace to the waiting world.

PRAYER

For the peace of Easter accept our thanks, dear God. We are deeply grateful that we may salute the risen Christ. Help us to keep our homes such places of peace that his spirit may forever dwell with us there. *Amen.*

15. PSALM FOR THE SORROWING

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Ps. 22:1-5, 19-28

"For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard." (Vs. 24.)

SPRING

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Usually Easter devotions deal with the joy of the season, filled with the springtime flowers and the resurrection of the earth itself to new beauty. Today our theme comes from a more sober side of Easter, being centered in a consideration of some of the truths at the heart of Good Friday, which has been termed the Day of Sorrow for the Christian world. The title of the meditation is "Psalm for the Sorrowing."

Psalm for the Sorrowing

"Why did this have to happen to me?" My friend crushed the yellow slip of paper which had been handed her only a few moments before by a telegraph messenger.

She looked at the telegram again and shook her head.

"Why? Tell me why." She sobbed as she carefully smoothed the wrinkles from the yellow paper.

Even as I also wondered why this sorrow had come, she said to me brokenly, wistfully, "I feel so forsaken and alone—as though God had forgotten all about me."

These words sounded so familiar I wondered if she had said them earlier that afternoon. Then I realized they were the modern paraphrase of an age-old question. How often I had heard it in sermons during Easter week, particularly on Good Friday.

Among the last words that Jesus said on the cross were

PSALM FOR THE SORROWING

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). This heartbroken cry resounds across the years as people meet unexplained sorrow and adversity. Sooner or later all adults find themselves in some circumstance where their hearts echo this cry from the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Yet this statement of apparent despair is so at variance with the songs of Easter morning that it is a "puzzlement." Carefully I have filed away all explanations of this particular verse of despair. So another interpretation of this verse comes as a wonderful Easter gift, which I want to share. After a busy morning of shopping I stepped into a church where a young chaplain was just beginning to speak on this word from the cross.

He explained that when he was asked to speak on this theme he had remembered the fine young men in uniform who had so often asked him "why" and who had felt forsaken away from home and loved ones.

He said that in any group there must be many men and women who had in some way suffered because of the Korean campaign, World War II, or World War I, perhaps back even further in our country's history. To all there was a message of assurance growing out of the Saviour's cry of despair.

First of all, the words "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" appear not once but twice in the Bible. During Easter week the words form a part of the New Testament story of the crucifixion scene. But the same words also

SPRING

appear in the Old Testament as the first verse of Ps. 22.

The speaker proceeded to read aloud the entire psalm, which immediately precedes the Shepherd's psalm. I was so surprised at the message that I nearly rose from the pew. This verse sounded exactly like a refrain from the Hallelujah Chorus: "For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations" (Ps. 22:28).

Yes, in the psalm which begins in despair, by asking the elemental question of the universe, there are also many wonderful assurances. Indeed, Ps. 22 is a psalm with a definite promise of triumph: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee" (vs. 27).

After reading the psalm, the chaplain said that he had told the soldiers in his charge he thought it not unlikely that Jesus might have been quoting from this psalm to give himself comfort on the cross. Certainly many men in battle often found strength from verses learned at home. Young men had gone to their deaths repeating the words "The Lord is my shepherd." Then could not Jesus during his mortal physical pain also have been quoting a psalm for strength and spiritual sustenance?

He knew the Old Testament well. The Bible tells us that. Perhaps as the ordeal of the Crucifixion wore on, Jesus had focused his mind on the words of the twenty-second psalm, hoping to quote through to the glorious end-

PSALM FOR THE SORROWING

ing. Maybe only the fragmentary first verse remains in quotation marks, the haunting cry of "Why?"

Perhaps he continued to quote the following words of triumph, which were lost to quotation because of the unlistening multitude around the foot of the cross. Could it be that whispers of those other verses came to that Roman soldier, the centurion, so that he began to get a glimpse of the promised victory? Certainly we know that after the Crucifixion the Bible records that this soldier testified, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54).

Whether or not the soldier actually heard further quotations, he had caught something of the essential spirit of Easter, for he glimpsed the dawn of ultimate triumph even though he had heard the cry of despair, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Just now I was hearing this cry again from my friend who was staggered by tragedy. I wondered if I could tell her that she was using modern phrases for one of the oldest cries of despair in the world. Even more, I wanted to be able to urge her to read further in the psalm so she could find hope.

Because the Kingdom does belong to God, it was possible for a day to come in my friend's life when she could feel that her experience of despair was incorporated in that blessed kingdom. She could even find comfort now if she balanced her cry of despair by believing the promises of assurance that follow the cry of despair in Ps. 22.

SPRING

Even as I tried to help her, I began to store away in my mind these positive assurances of the beautiful psalm for use in my own life. At times evil and indifference do seem to defeat goodness; sorrow appears to outweigh Christian joy; temptation is vehement. We cry out, "Why? why? Why?"

But the questioning must only be an involuntary gasp before we take deep breaths of God's spiritual air and continue to finish the course set before us, until like our Master we, too, can say, "It is finished."

PRAYER

Our Father, we are grateful for the inner assurance that thou dost hear and answer the deepest cries of our hearts when in despair. We ask for faith sufficient to live courageously through whatever dark days may be ours, serenely confident of the ultimate triumph expressed in the glorious promise of Easter. *Amen.*

16. THE BROKEN PITCHER

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Eccl. 12:1-7

"Remember now thy Creator. . . . Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." (Vss. 1, 7.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

A high point in the Christian year is the observance of Easter within our churches, with special music by the choir, extensive decorations of beautiful flowers. Special sermons emphasize Easter's message of comfort and hope. Today's meditation takes its theme from an experience which might happen in many household kitchens. Easter's hope is mirrored in the story of a broken clay pitcher.

The Broken Pitcher

The pitcher lay on the floor, broken. The graceful spout and curved handle were snapped off, the beautiful earthen bowl chipped. Momentarily it seemed more like the death of an old and much-loved friend than the shattering of a clay pitcher.

This had been a special pitcher. Indeed, I had watched it being made at the potter's wheel. How often as I set the

SPRING

table had I stopped to admire its warm tones, the grace of its simple lines.

Now it was broken beyond repair. Near the larger pieces was a scattering of particles as small as the dust from which it had been formed.

Never had it been so hard to cling to the household rule that the family must never cry over the loss of material possessions. After all, aren't there only two possible outcomes? Either the articles are damaged and lost, or we eventually must leave them to others.

After a mental tussle, with regret I scooped up the larger fragments. Then I went for the broom and the dustpan. As I swept up the dusty particles, I glanced out the kitchen window to the garden where the lily buds were beginning to open.

Carrying the clay dust, I went out, but the flowers only reminded me of the springtime when we had brought the pitcher into our home.

Faithfully it had served: cold water on a hot afternoon, milk for a child, orange juice from the tree with the fragrant blossoms. All of this I remembered standing in the garden by the border of daffodils.

I decided to pick some flowers now, golden as the sun. Nearby were some forget-me-nots, sky blue. Inside the house I went in search of a proper vase. But I kept remembering the broken pitcher.

Getting fresh water for the flowers, I glanced at the be-

THE BROKEN PITCHER

loved pitcher, still on the sink. Could my pitcher possibly become a vase?

As I filled it almost to the brim, no leaks were evident. The daffodils leaned to the sides, covering the exterior marks of breakage.

Carefully I carried the flowers to the table by the window to the east. There I placed the bouquet on the homespun scarf with its cross-stitched hem, beside the open Bible.

Through the nearby window came the clean, fresh breezes, and sunshine reflected on the broken pitcher now transformed into a vase. Looking at this bouquet, I was reminded of the beautiful story of Easter.

Before my eyes did beauty blossom from broken clay. And Easter brings to human hearts the blessed promise that eternal beauty shall emerge from mortal clay, broken at death, but transformed through faith in Easter's risen Lord.

So year after year the broken clay pitcher holds in our home a special bouquet for Easter. And through the routine days of the year, when faced with doubt and despair through death and loss, we are helped to remember the Easter promise: beauty shall blossom from broken clay.

PRAYER

Our loving heavenly Father, we are so grateful that through faith in our risen Lord we may accept the Easter promise as our own. And when the shattered fragments of

SPRING

our earthly dreams lie around us, may we always have grace to remember that they are welded together in the wealth of eternity's time and space. *Amen.*

17. GIFT FOR THE SPIRIT

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Ps. 61

"So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may daily perform my vows." (Vs. 8.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

An important special day in the springtime is the Sunday in May reserved for honoring mothers. It is a time within our churches to pay homage to the qualities which make for unselfish daily living. Today we consider how music helps contribute to the joy of living in our homes as mothers sing the beloved hymn tunes some of which date back to the early psalms of the Church.

Gift for the Spirit

"You'll never guess what I have as my gift for the baby shower," said the young mother in our neighborhood as she met me in the store.

GIFT FOR THE SPIRIT

She pointed to a thin, square package under her arm which could only contain a phonograph record. "A record of lullabies," she told me happily.

Then she explained that more and more she had found it difficult to buy a baby-shower gift in her circle of friends. "There are always duplicates," she said, "and all of them for the material needs of the baby. I decided to get something impractical."

But was this gift in the impractical class? The longer I thought about it, the more it seemed that her gift might be among the ones which would truly last. Certainly the young mother who receives the gift of music will cherish it.

For when she is tired or discouraged, she can put on the phonograph record and hear one of America's best choruses singing the words of a lullaby which has lasted through the years.

The song will encourage her in the routine tasks of the day. For by keeping a song in her heart, a little of the hummed tunes on her lips, she can better get through the mountain of work which will be hers as a young mother.

Is music an intangible gift? Certainly the truest gifts which come from mothers themselves are not the tangible ones, but the gifts of the spirit: a happy heart, courage to face the unexpected, faith to believe in the best despite the evidence of the worst, love enough to forgive and forget life's hurts.

Such intangibles can be encouraged by the gift of a song,

SPRING

particularly the beautiful hymns of the Church. Happy is the family where children receive as a part of their heritage the harmonious beauty of beloved hymn tunes as cherished and sung by mothers.

PRAYER

Our loving heavenly Father, accept our thanks for all the blessings which are ours because of mothers and the songs they keep in their hearts. We are grateful for the help which is ours as we recall the words of the beloved hymns of the Church. And we pray that the melody in our hearts may echo forth in kind words from our lips. *Amen.*

18. GOD BLESS THE PARSONAGE

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Ps. 84:1-12

"Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee." (Vs. 4.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Sometimes we have devotions dealing with some aspect of the church itself. Now we consider a building closely

GOD BLESS THE PARSONAGE

allied with the Church, but seldom given the true attention and respect it deserves unless there is a matter of household repair calling for budget expenditure. Today we focus our thought for a few minutes on four words, "God bless the parsonage."

God Bless the Parsonage

On the living-room wall of the community parsonage hung the black-framed, cross-stitched motto "God Bless Our Home." My curly-haired playmate, whose father was the preacher, told me this was the first thing her mother unpacked whenever they moved into a new town.

The motto had some tall trees cross-stitched in green and a tiny house with a fence and flower garden. Some pink and blue French-knot posies made the period to the sentence of blessing.

Often I am reminded vividly of this motto, which I have not seen for many years. For as my husband and I drive cross-country in our automobile, we glimpse the spires of churches beyond the trees. Somewhere nearby and associated with each church is a parsonage, and often it looks as did the miniature in the framed motto.

Thinking of what the parsonage itself does in each community or city to help meet the needs of people, I have often wished there could be a giant motto in which grateful citizens might say, "God bless the parsonage."

SPRING

Yet perhaps our cities and villages have already prepared such a tribute, even if unwritten or unspoken. For the banks, groceries, drugstores, hospitals, and schools automatically form a community cross-stitching that highlights the house in which live the minister and his family.

Sooner or later the life of the community is touched by activities emanating from the parsonage, often located next door to the church. Perhaps both are painted the same color, and there is more in this uniformity than the fact that there happened to be in the paint business a generous deacon in charge of repairs. For parsonage and pulpit are inextricably linked together in America with its emphasis on sanctity of the home and freedom of religion.

Maybe the parsonage is located farther down the block from the church, where a group of women in house dresses go up the sidewalk carrying sewing baskets and covered dishes. For this may be missionary-meeting day, and nobody else could take the meeting this month. So the parsonage was opened again in order that the repairs on garments for overseas might be continued, as the church extends its influence beyond the limits of the city and the nation.

Or a number of young people stand outside in earnest conversation with the bareheaded, coatless pastor, notebook in hand, obviously interrupted in his sermon preparation. Could it be that the automobile tragedy five miles back down the national highway had involved a student friend?

This pattern of parsonage and church is repeated endless-

GOD BLESS THE PARSONAGE

ly in America from seashore to mountains, across deserts and plains, by rivers and lakes, in a setting of golden grain or ripened fruit and fragrant flowers.

Down Mexico way the brown-adobe square parsonage home has been given a coat of whitewash by some of the barefooted boys in the village. For white is a symbol of cleanliness, and the young mission pastor hopes that he can bring sanitation into the missionary field.

As the transcontinental highway leads northward into Canada, a gray-stone manse is surrounded by a bulb garden with red and white tulips to be taken indoors to decorate the church next Sunday morning. There is even now being prepared a cutting garden of chrysanthemums for fall bouquets for the sick.

Once in a remote settlement in Alaska we encountered a parsonage built from an abandoned dance hall, now converted into a church. There in a portion of this building lived the pastor and his family. On days when ships were in port, he served as a deck hand. Why? Because he wanted to earn money to help repair this "parsonage" to make extra rooms for wives of servicemen who had come out to that area with small babies only to find no housing available.

Here too we recognized the parsonage, for there was a piano around which groups might sing the old hymns. On the wall was a picture of the never-changing Christ, who is the head of this home, the unseen guest at every meal.

And how many meals are served at these parsonage tables

SPRING

in lean years and good, with whatever food the particular community provides, and how often are there guests! It may be the visiting dignitary who has preached the special sermon this Sunday, or the lone one, all of whose relatives are now gone. But the parsonage table provides an extra plate, even as it did for childhood playmates.

Just seeing the parsonage in a distant community can open the mind to its own cherished memories and dearest dreams. Into the air comes the remembered fragrance of hot chocolate and cinnamon toast as served in the parsonage on rainy nights when the young people who sang in the choir drifted over after church.

For some there is the memory of a wedding, with pink roses picked from the garden wall and arranged on the fireplace mantel. Today the garden has its corner clump of pink and red hollyhocks, just like the ones which grew "back home." Truly the preacher man was right when he said that the garden gives reassurance that life renews itself.

Often he would pick a story from his garden to use on Sunday mornings when he walked over from his "study" to the church to preach from his pulpit. That room might have been lined with many bookcases, or it may have been one little table in a corner of the parsonage living room. But on his study desk he composed the message for his day, across changing circumstances and varying needs of those who came to listen.

In the parsonage bookrack were pamphlets for marriage-

GOD BLESS THE PARSONAGE

counseling for the young, and nearby a book of consolation for one who had just lost her mate of fifty years. Sometimes he would give away a well-marked volume, saying, "Here is a psalm to help you just now."

And always there was and is the Bible to be picked up from the table and put under his arm as he goes to make a call, sometimes accompanied by the parsonage wife.

Whatever else may be said in that call, regardless of the immediate cause and need, the minister is almost sure to say, "May God bless your home." From how many hearts and lives arise daily the unspoken and earnest reply, "May God bless the parsonage."

PRAYER

We pray a special prayer today, God, for the parsonage connected with our own church. Help us to remember that this building is an important part of the great chain of homes across the world which try to reflect in earthly activities for others the beauties of thy heavenly grace. Let our parsonage be a symbol of love in our community, lighting the way to companionship for those who stumble in the darkness of loneliness. *Amen.*

19. HEIRLOOMS FOR WHAT?

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: II Tim. 2:19-26

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour." (Vs. 20.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

During spring months our attention is more than ever focused on happy homes, as we see young people planning their marriages. Often it is a time for wedding showers and parties, and the sharing of treasures which have been kept in the family for times of special significance and sentiment. Today our meditation concerns such heirlooms and raises a question about their best usefulness.

Heirlooms for What?

"To think that all these years I have been so careful of these blue dishes. And now my daughter doesn't even want them."

Sadly my friend pointed to the dishes which she herself had always enjoyed having in her home. She had treasured them so much that she had hoarded them from use so they would be safe for her daughter and the daughter's family.

HEIRLOOMS FOR WHAT?

Shielded from hard use "because someday they will go to my daughter," the dishes more often than not remained on the cupboard shelf. Days when they might have brightened a dinner table, bringing courage and cheerfulness through their happy pattern, the cupboard door had been shut.

Perhaps if they had been so used, the daughter would have had a special affection for the plates and truly wanted them in her own home. Instead, she had said she would prefer her own set of dishes. Almost as good as new, the heirloom dishes would now need to be discarded since it was necessary for the parents to move into a smaller home.

These dishes were mute evidence of what often happens in families when the best manners and the special kindnesses are saved in the cupboard of life and used only on certain occasions. Manners and kindnesses may become chipped in the rugged routine of daily living, but even so they will have been used and not hoarded. The children will come to think in terms of at least trying to use the best in dealing with one another and with their own families later.

While it is sad to see family possessions discarded because no one wants them, it is far worse to see personalities deteriorate to the point where no one cares about preserving family solidarity and traditions.

One way to keep this dissolution from occurring is to try to see that the precious tangible and intangible possessions of family living are used every single day.

SPRING

The practice of a cheerful "good morning" may help set an attractive table for breakfast. Remembering to ask a table grace may help tune the spirit to know there is help from God in whatever problems the day may bring.

Interest in the professional problems of a loved one may help sustain him through crisis, and such interest should not be reserved for the stranger.

The harm which may come through frequent usage is not so great as that which often comes from neglect or disuse, as the unwanted dishes on the shelf bear mute evidence.

PRAYER

Dear Father, as members of the whole family of earth and heaven, may we live our days in usefulness. Keep us from hoarding any of our Christian heritage. May it find its rightful place of helpfulness in our daily lives as we integrate the treasures of our hearts into right attitudes and actions. *Amen.*

20. THE POETRY OF ETERNITY

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Ps. 121

"The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore." (Vs. 8.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Probably one of the best-known sections of the Bible is the book of Psalms. Most of us have our favorite individual psalms. It is possible that we will find some of them referred to in the meditation today. For it constitutes the testimony of one who refers to the psalms as "the poetry of eternity."

The Poetry of Eternity

"Buy yourself something that will give you a lift," said my wise older friend as she handed me a dollar bill that birthday in the middle of the depression.

Immediately I thought of a gay scarf to brighten the worn suit used in job hunting. But en route to the accessories department of the clothing store, I paused to look at a display of books.

SPRING

In the center of the table was a slim volume with black cover and gold lettering which would fit easily into the pocket of a suit or the bottom of a purse. Supposing it to be poetry, I picked it up to discover it was the book of Psalms.

The book almost automatically opened to one of the most-quoted psalms. Standing by the browsing table, I read the opening lines of Ps. 121: "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills."

Perhaps it was this sudden encountering of the word "lift," which my friend had earlier that morning spoken in a more colloquial fashion, that aroused my attention. On impulse I felt that this book was what I wanted to buy with my "depression dollar."

Now over a quarter of a century old, the little book across all the intervening years has given me a daily "lift" as I have found it my most blessed and beautiful book of poetry. The stitching of the binding has long since loosened and the mucilage melted—perhaps from the heat of Bombay, combined with the dampness of the Highland country in Scotland, encountered in our freighter trip around the world. The book has also traveled over Canadian and Yukon territory roads to where the roadway ends at Circle, Alaska, over two routes to Mexico City, and high above the Pacific in a plane to the Hawaiian Islands.

But even more it has proved a dependable companion

THE POETRY OF ETERNITY

in the everyday routine duties of a housewife and office worker. Exactly halfway down the middle of a well-worn page are the comforting words of faith: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Ps. 91:1). Always this reminds that others have met their dark days and found release through reliance on the God who hears and answers.

While I was speaking recently with a friend who had just endured eye surgery, she spoke of the power of the psalms to give her a "lift" during the days of darkness. Cautioned not even to speak unless necessary, unable to turn her head from one side to another, lest tender stitches might be damaged, she thought at first she would go crazy through the long, dark hours. Then she found a way to personal peace.

When medication would wear off and she would be awake for a while, she began repeating a part of that most familiar of all psalms, the twenty-third. The loneliness disappeared.

"It was surprising what other psalms came back to me from my early childhood once I was shut away in the darkness," she told me. "Psalms I had forgotten in the rush of living would somehow be summoned up to the top layer of consciousness, and I found myself repeating a phrase here, a word there, and longing to remember all that went between. How I wished that I had spent more time in read-

SPRING

ing or deliberately trying to memorize against any eventuality."

Even so in happy days the book of Psalms also offers special meaning. Imagery with which a day of beauty may be recalled is exemplified in Ps. 65:13: "The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn, they shout for joy, they also sing." In that delightful picture for me is the remembered beauty of the green hills of England leading down to Canterbury and its cathedral where the psalms have been intoned to worshippers across the centuries.

Yet to another this same verse may recall a happy moment in the garden at home, planting daffodil bulbs. How well the psalms describe the events of the routine week, as hallowed phrases lift out of prosaic circumstances certain routine duties or habits. One of the most famous of such beautiful lines is the simple declaration "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord" (Ps. 122:1). Try paraphrasing that to see how different it sounds when put into the ordinary language describing church attendance. The psalms give the experience dignity, inspiration, a feeling of oneness and belonging with others of like aims, in this generation and those of past years.

Thus the psalms form a common denominator of humanity, a brief fragment of literature which comes close to uniting all men and women. Extremely practical, there is

even a psalm for sleeping, found near the beginning of the book. The third psalm has the line which says, "I laid me down and slept; I awaked, for the Lord sustained me" (vs. 5). In an age which relies on the sleeping capsule, the power of this verse was demonstrated by a woman of more than eighty years who quoted it on the night the telegram arrived telling of the death of her son. She read these words to her grieving family and set an example of trust by refusing the sedative offered.

The psalms can also bridge the distance between old age and youth, helping mortality to span the distance into immortality. My over-ninety grandmother in the rest home sometimes found it hard to remember that she even had a granddaughter. Yet she grew restive if the family did not call each day.

Standing at the entry to her room, I would say, "This is your granddaughter, and I've come to read the Psalms." By the time I had said, "The Lord is my shepherd," she could join me in the precious assurance, "I shall not want." By the time fifteen minutes of reading were finished, her mind might be clear enough to focus on asking about her son and his family and perhaps friends or acquaintances.

In how many different circumstances across the changing years has the little book sustained my heart and helped me in contacts with others. Far wiser than I dreamed was the gift of money invested in the book of Psalms.

SPRING

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, we are grateful that we have access to all the help in the book of Psalms. We remember the times when we have turned to it in the past, and we are glad that we may go forward in confidence relying on its wisdom. Help us in the transient routine tasks of each day to link our hearts to the poetry of eternity. *Amen.*



SUMMER

21. STAR LIGHT, STAR BRIGHT

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Ps. 8:1-9

"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained"
(Vs. 3.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Summer provides happy opportunities for the family to spend time together out of doors. Today's meditation concerns one such experience on a summer evening when the children of a family first discovered the beauty of the stars.

Star Light, Star Bright

When the picnic supper was finished, our family sat on the grass to talk in the lingering twilight. As darkness descended, the youngest members of the family suddenly discovered the stars. Lying on their backs on the lawn, they stared straight up into the sky, excitedly observing what seemed to them a fabulous new discovery.

"Look at the way those stars make a circle," they said to me, pointing.

"It always looked to me like a round table with one short leg, when I was a little girl," I told them.

SUMMER

Instantly the children sat up. "Do you mean they had the same stars *then?*" they asked me in hushed voices.

There was laughter at that. Then the laughter quieted. We adults seemed to sense anew that the stars, here ahead of us, would be here when all of us were gone.

I wanted to help these youngest members of the family circle come to feel at home with the stars. So together we traced the patterns in the sky—the same stars I had always known. The experience reminded me of our need to remember that they are the same stars. Grief or bewilderment can make us forget. Our recovery depends on our building our lives back to where we can see the stars again as shining firmly in the heavens above our own little restored world.

One of the most successful women I know, measured in terms of accomplishments for her family, church, and community, takes time to stand on the porch of her home for just a moment in the early evening. She watches the stars before she goes inside to resume her household tasks. It gives her a sense of security, of sincere purposefulness.

There is courage and strength in looking up at the enduring stars. Once while traveling on an ocean liner, my husband and I had occasion to note especially their brilliance.

We noticed a man pacing the deck. Back and forth he went as the ship moved through the tropical waters of the hot night, until finally we stopped him and motioned to the vacant deck chair near us.

"Thank you," he said; "I'm lonely and I don't want to bore anyone with my problems. But the truth is I'm glad for this special vantage point to look at the stars."

Then he told us that he had just signed on for another three-year term with a construction crew at work on the Pan American Highway through Central America down into South America.

"I had thought I was finished with working away from home," he said, "but one of our sons was seriously injured and needed repeated surgery. All our savings went into trying to secure his recovery. Since I can earn so much more this way, my wife and I decided I should go back to a foreign country to operate the heavy equipment for which the pay is so good. But I miss my wife and family."

He got out of the chair and went over to the rail of the boat, the better to see the stars. "When we made this decision, my wife reminded me of what she had told me when I left once before. We decided that we could believe it again, so I signed up. She said, 'Remember, the same stars.'"

Each of her letters she closed with the same heartening thought, he told us. He sat down again, quietly now. The stars had reminded him of his wife's unfailing devotion.

In another part of the world I learned how the stars had given courage to a civilian caught in the toils of war. When the Japanese invaded Malaya, he had been interned on twenty minutes' notice with no knowledge of whether

SUMMER

his wife and two daughters had escaped. These facts and the story of how the stars saved his reason I learned on the first night I ever saw the Southern Cross.

For three long years he stood in a prison camp every night and looked up at the stars and prayed, "Take care of my girls tonight, wherever they are." And he would stand there until he had sufficient inner reassurance that they were being taken care of so that he could go in to his own bunk. Finally the Red Cross was able to get word to him that his wife and daughters had escaped into Australia and were safe.

By looking up, man is often able to guide himself toward home. Desert prospectors sometimes sleep by day so that they may have the certain companionship and guidance of the stars by night.

So when the children discovered the stars, I wanted them to see what the psalmist had seen when he marveled, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

Comrades, indeed, are the parent and child who, hand in hand, stand silently beneath the stars.

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, when we look up to the great star-filled sky, we are more than grateful for thy wonderful

MY NEIGHBOR'S ROSE

care of us as individuals. Stay close to us in a swiftly moving world where the stars remind of thy steadfast, unchanging love. When faced with either sorrow or happiness, may we find true perspective as we remember the same stars shining on our pathway to thee. *Amen.*

22. MY NEIGHBOR'S ROSE

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Rom. 15:1-7

"Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification." (Vs. 2.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Sometimes summer seems to bring more opportunity to enjoy our neighbors. Just as whole communities in pioneer times used to have Fourth of July picnics in the park, neighborhood groups may picnic together in the yard of some home. Today's meditation tells of the experience two busy neighbors shared when a certain rose in the garden of one came into beautiful summer blossom.

My Neighbor's Rose

The day the bud first opened, I noticed the lovely shade of pink. I was glad that my neighbor had planted the

SUMMER

rosebush there by the fence, for I could see it from my chair at the table every time our family sat down for a meal.

The tightly wrapped bud changed into a young rose of unfurling beauty, just right for a corsage for a sixteen-year-old's party. Still my neighbor did not pick it, and I saw the blossom mature into a perfectly formed rose, round and fair.

Sturdy and substantial, all the petals remained on the blossom even though the wind came along and moved the stem in tempo with the bush itself. Each mealtime I would look out the window to see the rose blooming on my neighbor's rosebush.

The day came when the rose was in fullest blossom, the outer petals lying almost flat, but still supporting the deeper pink center. That day I said to my neighbor, "I'm going to miss that beautiful rose of yours, as the petals begin to fall to the ground. Thank you for leaving it for me to enjoy."

She looked at me with keen surprise and asked, "What rose?" So I walked with her to the bush, and then she told me sadly, "I've been so busy with family sickness that I haven't taken time to look at this bush in over a week, I guess." Then she expressed gratitude that there had been beauty from their home pointing to ours.

Sometimes now in the busy-day routine, I remember my neighbor's rose and how it blessed my life. And I try to

FIFTY-TWO SUNDAYS A YEAR

be more careful about what part of my life and home is pointed toward that of my neighbor.

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, we are grateful for the neighbors who bless our lives in daily association. Grant that our own influence may always reflect thy teachings of love and gentleness. Thus may our lives be used as factors for peace in the larger neighborhood of the world. *Amen.*

23. FIFTY-TWO SUNDAYS A YEAR

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Ps. 26:1-12

"Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth." (Vs. 8.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

With easy and quick transportation available today it is possible for many of us to visit parts of the world which would have been unheard of a few years ago. In our search for travel adventure it is easy to overlook the fact that one of the best experiences available to us is that of worshiping with others in their home churches. In this meditation our attention will be called to some of the values in attending church fifty-two Sundays a year.

SUMMER

Fifty-two Sundays a Year

After the benediction the white-haired man in the pew beside me reached for the bulletin by the aisle. "I need another copy to mail home," he said quietly.

My husband and I waited expectantly, and he continued, "Since my wife is dead, I do a lot of traveling, but every Monday morning I mail one bulletin to my son and his family and another to my daughter and her family. That way they know their father was well and in church on Sunday."

We told him we, too, were strangers in this church and would be mailing our bulletin to our home-town pastor. Together we shook hands with the pastor and the friendly door committee, proof of the interest of churches of America in the welfare of the "stranger within the gates."

Nowadays that stranger may have arrived by automobile, this being a spiritual rest stop on his three-thousand-mile trip. Or he may have flown into a city on business and taken a taxi to the church from his hotel. Our own habit of church attendance in travel has brought to my husband and myself some interesting experiences and choice memories.

Within the national parks of America are church services in which the permanent park employees take part, welcoming those who have come to see God's wonders, placed here for the enjoyment of all. We remember one memorable service the morning of a snowstorm in Grand Canyon.

Through large flakes we followed the tracks of the deer over to the brown recreation building which houses the church on Sundays. When the helpful service was ended, the snowplow was there which we could follow down to the main highway.

Beautiful piano music that morning was offered by the young woman who had served our meal in the dining room the night before. And the man who greeted us at the door was a high park official. For democracy is most apparent within the functioning of the Christian church.

Each of the churches visited has something in common besides its gospel message. Whether a large metropolitan church known by a huge radio following or the tiny wayside church at the crossroads, each is formed of devoted followers of the Christian way of life which makes up America.

The outreach of the church into foreign missions is another item of which we have become increasingly aware. Each church may be interested in a different foreign locality, but the combined efforts of the denominations pretty well "cover the earth" and indicate the world outlook of the combination of individual Christians serving in local churches.

Over and over we hear sincere prayers being asked for the triumph of Christianity over Communism. We are impressed with the prayer periods in the churches, the high tone of worship when all hearts turn to the source of inspiration. Some churches are trying "the period of silence,"

SUMMER

making it so intense you can nearly hear it. During these moments each is asked to seek for guidance in his own particular problem, turning his mind and heart upward, concentrating on the God of power.

Once we spent a Sunday morning along the famous Alaska Highway, leading to Alaska and the Arctic Circle. En route we found a wayside church staffed by a missionary priest, who conducted special services at eleven o'clock to which all travelers of every faith were welcome. He arrived with his paraphernalia packed in the back of a jeep because of the "roads" over which he was forced to do much of his travel. He told the trappers, prospectors, merchants, and mechanics of that area that he would be away all the next week "across the river" visiting remote villages. But in event of emergency they were to come down to the water's edge and blow three times on the horn of the automobile. An assistant would hear this call for help, come by boat to the landing to see what was needed, and get word to him in extreme cases.

Another vacation we headed southward, driving through Mexican villages and highlands until we got to beautiful Mexico City. The church came to the street's edge, with its walls rising sheer from the street, as did the department stores and homes. When we stepped through the door, we were surprised to find ourselves within an enclosed patio with green lawn and bright purple-flowered vines. Here

FIFTY-TWO SUNDAYS A YEAR

the parishioners gathered to visit before going inside to services of worship.

From a freighter trip around the world we recall with keen delight the proof we found that Americans everywhere try to observe the custom of church attendance, even if stationed in a foreign land. For we heard an Easter sermon being preached in English at the Ernie Pyle Theatre in Tokyo, Japan, switched into the taxicab from which we rode from the ship to our hotel. Sensing that we were Americans, the Japanese cab driver turned on the radio to the station broadcasting in English, and we listened to words of hope and assurance from the pastor in a strange land.

If the duties of earning a living take a person away from home, or the happy opportunities of vacations beckon to family travel, the church will be there welcoming. Attending some church someplace can be a rewarding experience fifty-two Sundays a year.

PRAYER

Keep us keenly aware, God, of our heritage of religious freedom. We thank thee for churches with open doors and that we are welcome to walk into the church of our choice and worship thee. Help us to realize that Sunday by Sunday we each have opportunity to exercise our privilege of citizenship by church attendance. Grant that enough of us may be such alert Christian citizens that the evil of Communism may be stamped out of the earth. *Amen.*

24. WHERE THERE'S LIFE

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Col. 1:9-13

"Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." (Vs. 11.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

There are times in the lives of all of us as individuals, and in our church and club life as well, when some plan of achievement is long delayed. Perhaps it is the hope to build a new clubhouse, or to burn the mortgage on the church, or even to find proper leadership for the new youth program. We grow impatient to see actual results and despondent over achieving our aims. Today's meditation is an incident from the garden to remind us to keep alive our hope and faith if we have planted correctly the seeds to begin the venture.

Where There's Life

"That plant will never bloom. I should pull it up now and throw it away." So I told my neighbor as together we looked at the brilliant zinnia hedge.

Yet somehow I could never quite bring myself to the

moment of grasping the green foliage around the center stem and pulling the roots of the seemingly barren plant from the surrounding soil.

"Let it wait until you must remove all the plants which have bloomed," advised my neighbor.

How glad I am now that I did give this tardy plant its chance in my garden. Despite its slow start, its disappointing lack of color through most of the summer, this bush finally provided me with beauty.

For it bloomed late in the season after all the other flowers were gone. Indeed it came to blossom on a day when I needed its bright color far more than I had earlier in the season.

Word had come that the father of a dear friend was ill, and I wanted something to carry in my hand when I went to ring her doorbell. Halfheartedly I looked at the now withered garden. To my surprise I found that one of the bushes was in golden flower.

Yes, the bush I had come so close to discarding and which had failed when the others prospered had now come into its own meaning of fruition. Here before me were six golden blossoms almost asking to be picked as they swayed toward me in the breeze.

How beautiful they looked on the bush, bravely flaunting their cherished color over the now gray-green leaves. As I picked them, they arranged themselves agreeably into an attractive nosegay. And later they made a perfect picture of

SUMMER

serenity and bright promise in the blue vase on the table in my friend's home.

Looking at the flowers, we were both cheered despite the reports from the hospital. After all, these blossoms had come from a bush which I had thought would never give me any flowers, the one in which I had almost lost faith before the season was over.

"Patience," the flowers seemed to say to us, "just wait awhile longer. Give every living thing every possible opportunity to develop."

As we looked at the flowers, my friend and I were encouraged to wait for better news from the hospital the next day, not to give up hoping for recovery. For we knew that silently the forces of growth and of health work. And before us was the perfect coloring of the late-blooming flowers.

PRAYER

When we are discouraged, dear Father, facing some long-delayed dream or plan of action, help us to remember the late-blooming flowers in our gardens. We have this reminder given us by nature that if the forces of growth are allowed to pursue their normal patterns, sometimes great beauty flowers in abundance. So may it be with our deferred hopes and ambitions. *Amen.*

25. THE HAPPY DRESS

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Isa. 61:1-11

"I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels." (Vs. 10.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

One of the household tasks which falls to us as women is cleaning out the closet and taking care of the family wardrobe. Often this offers us an opportunity to contribute good used clothing to missionary purposes. Sometimes there are certain dresses which have significant memories. Today our meditation concerns the various experiences of joy and sorrow encountered by a housewife as she wore what she called the "Happy Dress."

The Happy Dress

When I first saw the gray-blue dress, it was hanging on a rack in the department store, almost lost in the array of pink, white, and yellow frocks. But when I reached out to feel the sober material, it not only was soft and satiny

SUMMER

to the touch, but had the sturdiness of the handclasp of a friend.

"That dress should wear well," I thought instantly, "and I could dress it up or down." Little did I dream of the happy adventures into which this dress would lead me before its own final experience of happiness. For this was the completely happy dress!

Its rolled collar turned back almost like an old-fashioned middy blouse I had worn to school. Three buttons down the shirtwaist front were covered with the same material. Certainly I could not dream the day of purchase that they would later be changed into blue ceramic forget-me-nots, pink china roses, and silver bangles from a foreign land during the life span of this dress.

Looking back though, I can still remember the first time I wore the dress. It was to dinner with business friends of my husband. Because I wanted something not too fussy, but something in which I could feel a little festive, I chose this solely because it was new. My husband liked it and whistled when I came into the living room. That dress rustled in sheer pleasure and then relaxed comfortably around me as I sat down on the couch. Certainly from that moment on it was a member of the family.

When I wore it to church, I felt like a Puritan lady in gray daring to be almost sinfully gay when I put on a pink hat instead of a gray bonnet. When it was time to pour tea at club, I could put on a red hat and pin a red rose at

the throatline and feel I had a completely new outfit. Only this was better, for the dress didn't mind at all if I spilled tea down the front, since it stood so well the test of frequent cleaning.

Medicine had been cleaned from the skirt, leaving no spot whatever. And such a messy brown stain I had expected from where the bottle spilled on the hospital floor. As I had sat down to read a story to a neighbor child, imprisoned by a broken leg, the bottle had smashed to the floor, and the little girl had begun to cry, reaching out to touch my dress. Instantly she had relaxed and begged, "Please let me hold it; it feels so sort of coldlike." Sure enough the satiny finish did feel cool to a feverish hand.

After that I always wore the dress when I went on calls to the sick. Once a tired friend fighting loss said, "That dress is just the color of the sea where Bill and I used to go fishing together." Departing, the dress and I left her with a happy memory.

For the happy dress was not unwilling or afraid to go where sorrow dwelled, but walked serenely among those who mourned. It even comforted me when I tried to dress for the funeral of a businessman who had been the husband of my best friend. Later as I was serving luncheon to the relatives, that quiet gray-blue mingled with the black garb, but caught what sunlight there was as it came hesitatingly through the window by the vacant easy chair.

Next it was time for a business trip away, and the dress

SUMMER

begged to go along. Because it so seldom wrinkled, it could go to the bottom of the suitcase and be ready for any adventure. This dress went to church in our nation's capitol and helped me explore Independence Hall in Philadelphia.

It was destined to accompany its surprised owner on a trip by boat around the world. Here, as I loafed in a deck chair, it absorbed spray from the seven seas. So the dress attended services in cathedrals with their overarching murals, brightly colored stained-glass windows, sound coming from ageless organs.

Reluctantly when home I realized that this dress would need to say good-bye to the rest of my wardrobe, for it was faded by the sun, perhaps even by brilliant tropical moonlight. Since my closet space is small and since it seems wicked to have on hangers, clothes which are not being used, I wondered to which later use I should assign this dress. Should it go to an orphanage, or mission box, or for overseas relief? Because the cloth was wearing out, that didn't seem wise or generous.

While I was mulling over prospects, there came a knock at the door, timidly at first, and then louder. There stood two little girls and a gray kitten not far behind. "Please," they said, "we want to play lady and we wondered if you had something we could wear."

Just then the gray kitty said, "miaow," as if to remind me of the kitten-gray dress. So I went to the rack and fondly fingered the dress for the last time. Then I handed it to

THE HAPPY DRESS

the two little girls, whose eyes grew wide as saucers as they took hold of its soft folds. "Thanks, oh, thanks," they said to me, while my heart echoed the words, speaking them silently to the blue-gray dress.

And happy was I that in its last days the dress was to be happiest of all. For the children play lady in it often, pouring tea under the shady tree in their yard. The gray kitten now fast growing into a cat, rests his furry paws on the nearby hem of the gray dress as it sweeps the good earth of the playground. It is a happy dress yet.

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, grant to each of us a special sense of responsibility as we use the clothes in our family wardrobes. May we be dressed for service within our communities and do all that we can to pass along tangible items for others to use in the circle of their own lives. But even more grant to us a garment of grace surrounding our hearts so that we may at all times truly represent thy loving kingdom. *Amen.*

26. LET THE YARN FALL LOOSELY

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Luke 12:22-32

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Vs. 32.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

When summer months come, the usual busy tempo of yearly activities sometimes diminishes. Theoretically at least this gives women more time for the handcraft hobbies they enjoy. It also affords opportunity for the making of objects for the church bazaar in the fall or to send to the mission field in preparation for the holiday season. Today's meditation concerns the lesson about life's tensions which a woman learned from the needlework in her hand.

Let the Yarn Fall Loosely

One of the chores of the housewife who enjoys needlework is winding the hanks of yarn which will later appear in a many-colored afghan.

If the family pet could be persuaded to extend his paws while sleeping on his back, the yarn could be comfortably held in that fashion. Lively as pets are, there is still more

LET THE YARN FALL LOOSELY

chance of lassoing them than of getting Junior to keep from wiggling during the winding process.

True, the man of the house will enjoy napping beneath the completed crocheting or knitting. But now he lacks the energy to help hold the yarn, for he needs his strength to push the television button.

So the housewife prepares for the job herself. By putting the yarn across her kness and bracing herself against the sofa and coffee table, she manages almost to complete the awkward task.

That is, until the hank slips and comes into her lap, with all the strands mixed up into one conglomerate glob. Untangling such a skein the other day, I remembered the serenity of my grandmother as she wound a ball of yarn. I had been holding my arms out wide and stretching the yarn tight when Grandmother discovered the tangled threads.

"Child, always let the yarn fall loosely," she told me, pulling my arms in closer in a more relaxed position. She said that the very tenseness and tightness of my arms had produced the tangle.

Giving the hank a soft shake so it loosened into several sections, she soon had the strands separated. Then she wound the ball in her usual neat fashion.

Her words come back to me whenever I wind yarn for needlework. And I remember them in between times too. Letting the strands fall loosely in any family problem some-

SUMMER

times relaxes a tense situation enough so that a solution can creep in almost unnoticed.

Or perhaps the housewife finds the right answer in some part of her heart or back of her mind while her fingers fashion the lovely design from the yarn, making something for her home.

PRAYER

We are so grateful, dear God, for the example of peace and poise in the midst of difficulty which we have in the inspired example of Jesus, our leader. We recall how he knew the divine secret of serenity, and we know too that when we are most relaxed in prayer and composed in our tasks, we feel closest to thee and best able to serve our families and others. Forgive us then the tensions which we allow to come between our daily selves and our best potential selves. Give us wisdom to keep tension at a minimum. *Amen.*

27. HIGHWAY COMRADESHIP

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Isa. 35:1-10

"And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." (Vs. 8.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

A special joy of the summer season is the vacation travel by family automobiles. All ages pore over road maps and pictures of places they wish to visit. Today our meditation begins in learning about some of the light signals which are used by the truck drivers who make the highways their homes for such a large portion of the seasons.

Highway Comradeship

Blinking lights of the giant trucks which travel the highways by night constitute one of the most interesting customs of modern travel. The headlights and taillights, the string of red lights outlining the shape of the huge trailer, plus occasional bronze and green lights, all have meaning to the men who drive.

These young men skilled in operating the powerful

SUMMER

machines are called upon daily to exercise courage and caution. They have built a highway comradeship in which light signals compose a new language in America. The language of these lights surpasses the various tongues the truck drivers speak.

Lowering of lights when meeting another truck is simple courtesy to make it easier for the driver to see his way. Blinking the lights after one truck passes another going in the same direction indicates to the driver ahead that the roadway is now clear and he can pull over in safety. If a driver needs more clearance in passing, he can signal asking the other driver for it. That driver will reciprocate and tell of his willingness by a flashing of lights.

One long blaze of light from a special searchlight kept handy indicates there is an emergency ahead for which the oncoming truck should prepare. He should perhaps apply the brakes to get ready to stop because of an accident ahead. Or he may get ready to stop to help someone in need.

This lesson in comradeship makes one ask his heart: "What are the Christian light signals on the highway of life?"

Well, the simplest signal is that of giving a daily smile and helping hand to those whom one meets in school or business.

The great searchlight is that of sacrificial love which the Christian stands ready to flash into the dark places

AT THE END OF THE HOSE

of life when emergencies loom in the lives of fellow travelers along life's way.

These lights of the highway of the Cross can guide the heart into paths of usefulness and service in meeting the problems of the present day. Travelers of such a highway know with increasing sureness the companionship of Christ, who is the light of the highways of the heart.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, it is good to know that we may travel the highway of the Cross on our earthly journey toward eternity. Give to us adventurous hearts that we may take all the beauty available in each routine day. Keep us in thy care that we may not harm any traveler either by design or by accident. *Amen.*

28. AT THE END OF THE HOSE

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Job 8:8-19

"Can the rush grow up without mire? can the flag grow without water?" (Vs. 11.)

SUMMER

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

The heat of summer sometimes calls for extra watering of the flowers in the garden. Standing alone with hose in hand, the housewife has a moment all to herself, away from the conversation of the family. Today's meditation concerns the searching questions which came into the heart of a woman as she surveyed the flowers at the end of the hose.

At the End of the Hose

When I planted zinnias last summer, I extended the edge of the garden beyond its usual boundaries. Carefully picking out the strongest plant of all, I placed it in the fresh ground which had never yet had a crop to deplete its soil.

"Surely the hose can be made to reach that far," I told myself and hopefully set out to water the edge. But the hose was short.

Sometimes it was possible to send the water the required distance to reach this plant, if I placed my finger in the end of the hose and truly forced the water out in a thin trickle.

But this was not enough to sustain life in even this healthy plant. It failed to grow as fast as the lesser which received the full flow of water. Finally the once-healthy

AT THE END OF THE HOSE

zinnia became a dry, dusty brown so that the stalks were brittle, and easily broken.

As I looked at the flowerless stalk, I regretted that I had not placed it where it might receive more of the necessary water.

Then the terrifying thought came to me: "What must it be like to be the head of a nursery or orphanage and see children out beyond the reach of the supplies of life-giving liquid and foods?"

I wondered if I had ever been guilty of keeping a child from its rightful energy because I had not helped to extend necessary supplies until they reached all needy children.

Had I delayed sending my contribution to a deserving fund? Had I refused entirely to read such requests?

Perhaps I was so busy pouring unnecessary water on the pampered plants close at hand that I was failing even to try to extend what was available to those at greater distance.

Standing in my garden pulling out the deadened plant, I resolved firmly to try to do better in answering calls of human need "at the end of the hose."

PRAYER

Forgive us, dear God, the times we have been guilty of keeping others from their full portion of the water of life. Enlarge our vision that we may see what happens to others when we fail to give of our available substance. Keep us instant in prayer that we may sustain those who

SUMMER

minister to thy children in the drought-stricken areas of poverty, disease, and superstition. *Amen.*

29. TOOLS OF HIS TRADE

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: I Cor. 3:9-14

“For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building.” (Vs. 9.)

LEADER’S INTRODUCTION

Labor Day is one of the interesting holidays of the year. Coming at the end of summer, it provides an opportunity for the family to enjoy time together, free from the usual activities which keep the hands busy and the mind occupied with details of earning a living. It also focuses attention on the problems of men and women in industry. Today our meditation concerns a workman who understood well the dignity of all honest labor.

Tools of His Trade

Carefully he picked up the wrench and wiped it with a rag from the hip pocket of his workman’s overalls. Then

he opened the big valise on the floor and almost tenderly placed the tool in the bag.

When I said the container looked like a doctor's medicine bag, he replied with a smile that he had used it to "doctor" a good many broken-down pieces of furniture and sick-looking houses.

"I've owned these tools for many years," he told me, "and I bought them from a man who had used them for more than half a century. He made me promise that I would always use them as long as I was able to work, and not give them away. He wanted to be sure they would get good care, for they had served him so well."

He paused now to take a good look around to see if he had picked them all from the worktable. "One of the first things my father taught me when I was a little boy picking up shavings around his carpenter bench was to take good care of tools," the workman told me simply.

"Father always said you could tell a lot about what kind of carpenter a man was by the way he treated the tools with which he worked every day." He stood there smiling, with a treasured hammer in his hands, his gnarled fingers sliding over the smooth metal.

Watching him, I heard the echo of his father's counsel, "You can tell a lot about a man by the way he treats his tools." And I thought of another carpenter shop two thousand years ago and wondered if similar advice had

SUMMER

so impressed a little lad that in his ministry nearly thirty years later he would emphasize the importance of building wisely.

As I went about my housework, filling the newly completed cupboards, I thought about the tools of his eternal work: a smile which can plane away the rough edges of daily living, the kind word which has power to reshape and mold, honesty which hammers out a man's integrity.

PRAYER

God, the work of thy hands includes this great world itself. All that we have has been made by thee. Help us to be honest workmen day by day in gratitude for all thy blessings. May the work of our hands show clearly the faith of our hearts. *Amen.*

30. A DIFFICULT FAREWELL

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Ps. 91:1-16

"He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." (Vs. 1.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

One of the joys of our association together is in welcoming newcomers to our group. And it is a matter of corresponding sorrow when someone leaves our association to go to a new location. We are to be reminded today of some of the emotion involved in such changes by an example through the familiar medium of our much-loved gardens.

A Difficult Farewell

One of the hardest parts of moving is leaving behind friendship's garden. Even if the family has lived in the house but a short time, there are usually plants of sentimental significance.

And if the home has been the same for several years, the garden is sure to be greatly missed.

For here by the water faucet is the pink azalea bush sent when mother was ill and in the hospital. Happy the day when she and the plant came home together. And the bush has seemed to prosper even as she has improved in health.

By the corner of the garden is the red pyracantha bush sent by business friends of the man of the house when the family first arrived in the neighborhood. Each year it has provided food for birds, but they will return this fall,

SUMMER

only to find a new family, perhaps one which prefers berries to birds and will not welcome them.

Even the vacant spot in the garden has its memories. For this place, reserved for a white camellia, was repeatedly dug up by the puppy until he conquered it as bone ground. Why he wanted this particular spot, nobody found out, but want it he did and finally won out over the blossoms.

Where the telephone pole marks the lot edge, there is a special flowering shrub. It would have climbed higher except for the cat's claws, which tore the tender vine at the same time the pole was being used as a sharpening rack. But eventually both kitten and vine were older and stronger, and both survived.

Where the first red geranium was planted, there is now a border of fifteen varieties, grown from cuttings contributed by as many friends.

Saying good-by to the garden often means taking a good look at the delightful assortment of friends the family has accumulated. Often the garden is visible evidence of gestures of friendship, and saying good-by is one of the bad moments of moving. It's hard, for the moment, to believe the new home will bring its own friends and memories.

PRAYER

God, there are so many times in our lives when we are called upon to move on to some new experience. If there

A DIFFICULT FAREWELL

is not an actual physical moving to a different location, then circumstances call for growth within our hearts and minds. We ask that thou wilt be with us always, whether we go or stay, that we may have the strength and wisdom to meet the changing times. *Amen.*



FALL

31. SAFE IN THE HARBOR

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Ps. 119:111-17

"Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe: and I will have respect unto thy statutes continually." (Vs. 117.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Fall winds have a tendency to make us grateful for the snug safety of our homes. We are glad to see the harvest of crops gathered safely into storehouses and our cupboards filled with fruit of our orchards. Today's meditation concerns a happy vacation memory, the cherished picture of ships safe in the harbor.

Safe in the Harbor

A rich memory for those who visit the West Coast is time spent at the famous Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco. There the tourist sees a massed assembly of the ships which put out to sea for the many varieties of fish which form the foundation of the area's delicious sea-food dishes.

Perhaps the visitor stands silently looking out over the harbor at the moment when the brilliant sunset is blessing

FALL

the scene with its golden benediction. Here the watcher sees all the ships of assorted sizes, safe in the harbor.

Home now from their wanderings, anchored after the sometimes stormy sessions at sea, the ships rest before resuming the restless search with the morning light. Big and little, from far and near, all the ships find a haven at Fisherman's Wharf.

Perhaps it is this very evidence that they are together, safe in the harbor, which draws the eyes of the tourist back again and once again to this spot of beauty. For in the heart of each individual is the longing to feel safe and secure, to rest at peace.

Yet the normal demands of earning a living, coping with the problems which occur day by day within each lifetime, demand that the individual go out into the restless seas of living amid turmoil.

How wonderful it is, then, if he can keep his own heart anchored safely in the harbor of God's love, to know that he has a point to which he may return and know eternal safety despite the storms of personal disappointment.

"Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe." (Prov. 29:25.) This promise is for all who seek a harbor for the heart, a haven for the soul.

This assurance does not limit safety to the days of easy going, but gives its blessings to the trusting individual no matter how severe are the stresses of daily living. Those who accept its truth can remain anchored safe in the

MY YEAR OF NO GIVING

harbor even when the hurricanes of seeming hopelessness blow their bitterness amid dark days of confusion and despair.

And the harbor's serene beauty safely surrounds the trusting heart in the sunlit days of happiness through service.

PRAYER

Dear God, our lives are being lived in a time of turmoil when even the ships of state seem sometimes to travel in disturbed waters. Grant to each of us the inner peace which comes from trusting in thee. Bless the leaders of the nations of the world, that lasting peace may be achieved because their hearts, too, are anchored in thee. *Amen.*

32. MY YEAR OF NO GIVING

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: II Cor. 9:6-15

"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver." (Vs. 7.)

FALL

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

One of the problems in almost every church group in the fall is the matter of raising funds for missions and planning the budget for the new church year. Often the every-member canvass is conducted around the time that the fall activities are beginning. The success of this project depends in part on the devotional attitude of our hearts toward giving. Today our meditation concerns the testimony of a woman who faced the problem of "no giving" and made a decision concerning her future conduct.

My Year of No Giving

"I'm absolutely through with giving. This is the last 'good cause' to which I will contribute either time or money."

I said it, and I meant it. For one whole year I stuck to it. Then I decided that although the various calls for giving needed me, I needed them more.

My decision to stop giving came at a time in my personal life when I wanted to strike back at something. I was sick and tired of being good old reliable me. I would stop being such a softy when somebody wanted money for his favorite cause, a cake for the bake sale, or somebody to stuff envelopes.

It seemed to me that good causes kept tumbling down on my head like a crowded cupboard which has been disturbed.

I decided to let the mail requests accumulate. When the desk box got full, I took them outside and burned them in the incinerator. "There, that disposes of them," I told myself.

But it didn't. For there were the appeals that came over the telephone. It always seemed to ring when I was in another part of the house.

"I asked for you on my ticket list, so we could have a nice little visit," said the acquaintance at the other end of the line. She wanted me to buy my usual tickets to the benefit nearest her heart.

I told her I had decided this year to buy tickets only to those affairs which I could manage to attend, and I didn't think I would be available at this particular date. Well, couldn't I give the ticket to somebody else, if I really wanted it used? I was sorry, but I couldn't. My solicitor said finally that she would call me next year when the party was again being organized, and she hoped I would feel better by that time.

The better part of a half-hour had already been consumed in behalf of this benefit, and all I had managed to do was offend the volunteer who, after all, was giving her time to call me. But at least I had kept to my resolve, I told myself grimly, and maybe they would forget about me by next year. Six times I went through this routine for six major benefits in my well-organized home town.

Then there were all the times I said I wouldn't be able to bake a cake for the food sale. You'd think that would have

FALL

given me time to do more baking for family or friends. But it seemed that I did even less, for in the past I had fallen into the habit of putting some extra cookies or another pie into the oven when baking for the food event.

Then there were the people who rang the doorbell asking for clothing for rummage sales, as well as the solicitors for institutions collecting material for the handicapped to renovate.

It was easy to stall saying I hadn't cleaned out the closet yet. Probably there was a sweater or pair of shoes I might have found, but I was through helping others carry their burden. We all have burdens, and we all work hard. Was anybody helping me with mine?

One night a little girl came to the door and asked me to join a school group. She said it didn't matter one bit whether I had a family or not. There was a contest on in her room, and whoever got the most names of new members got a treat of ice cream. I stifled the impulse to tell her I could buy her a lot of ice cream for less than the membership price. Something in her face stopped me from any comment. Was it possible that I would deliberately smother the enthusiasm of a child?

Secretly I began to wonder if I had been kidding myself. Was I tired of being pushed around, or was I, in reality, simply getting stingy? I made my next contribution to missions at the church larger than the last. But this did not salve my conscience.

After a whole year of no giving—except to my church—it was the solicitor who had said she would call back the next year who helped me get back on the track where I belonged. Yes, a whole year had rolled around. “I asked for you on my list again this year,” she said. “And I would like to sell you a ticket to our benefit on one condition. Don’t buy it unless you are in position to come and enjoy yourself.”

She went on to say she had not seen me in months, and one good thing about benefits was that it gave everybody a chance to at least say hello in a busy world.

All of a sudden I realized I *had* missed the fellowship, the seeing of people from a cross section of our town, each group giving some kind of benefit in behalf of others.

I found myself saying, “Send me two tickets, and I’ll put my check in the mail this afternoon.” Then I picked up the phone again and called a friend I had not seen for a happy-hearted visit in several months. “Be my guest at the first benefit of the new season,” I told her, “and let’s catch up on what’s been happening to each other.” She replied so swiftly I knew she had missed me, and already I felt warmed.

Well, I’ve taken in all the benefits this year—and I decided they’re rightly named. They have benefited—me. I have seen old friends, asked about their families, congratulated them on their successes.

—On the morning the little girl from the neighborhood came over to sell me my first calendar for the next busy year,

FALL

I said to her: "I read about your drive, and I've been wondering who would get here first."

"You're my first sale," she told me happily as she bounded down the lawn, and her happiness stayed with me all the morning.

The mail was still bringing me a new round of appeals for money for home and abroad. I put in the return envelopes what I could and sent them off.

For in my new campaign of giving I reached two positive decisions: give cheerfully and give promptly. Many good causes simply make many opportunities for me to extend my bit of influence! The promptness makes me enjoy the giving longer.

If I know that sometime during a campaign I am going to contribute, it is better to give even a small coin the very first day and encourage the worker than to spend a whole season walking by, procrastinating, thinking that eventually I will give a larger bill.

I live in a world which is so organized that giving is a part of it. Without giving, I become isolated and filled with self-concern. With giving, I have an opportunity to share in what is happening in this world for good.

I'm finished with no giving!

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, help us to search our hearts diligently to discover the sources of gratitude out of which

THE UNKNOWN VOICE

we may give as lavishly as circumstances permit. Help us to measure up to the demands on our pocketbooks by using wisely all the resources of health, talent, time, and money which thou dost give to us. Grant us wisdom in using our funds generously, that we may learn in this earthly chore some of the joys of eternity. *Amen.*

33. THE UNKNOWN VOICE

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Jas. 3:1-13

"Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom." (Vs. 13.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

As fall approaches, the tempo of our lives increases its pace. We think about all we have to do in church school, fulfilling our offices in the woman's society, or practicing the choir numbers. In our zeal to accomplish much, we sometimes become careless about matters of personality which influence others perhaps even more than our de-

FALL

voted service. The lesson today focuses our attention on the power inherent in our voices as we speak to one another.

The Unknown Voice

In great haste I dialed the telephone number of a good friend. If we both hurried our words, there might be time for a rushed conversation in the middle of dinner preparations about how we could crowd in an extra errand together next morning.

A totally unfamiliar voice answered the phone with a leisurely "Good evening." Well, I was certainly surprised. For I had expected the hasty "hello" yelled into the receiver as my friend and I have fallen into the habit of speaking.

So I said nothing, and the voice repeated, "Good evening. What can I do for you, please?"

I stammered a bit and finally confessed, "I guess I must have hit the wrong numbers. I'm sorry to have bothered you."

"Why, it was no bother at all," said the soft voice. "It's such a pleasure to have a telephone in the house. And now may I wish you good evening."

I hung up the receiver in a daze! How much I wished I knew who had been at the other end of the line. Why hadn't I asked her what number I did have? For I wanted to talk to her longer, to be able to call her someday and hear again the peace and calm of her voice as a blessing in a crowded day.

This unknown voice made me sit in the easy chair for five minutes, relaxing the tense fingers of my hand, heedless of the waiting phone call I had previously thought must be made. I took a few deep breaths and tried to slow down my huffing and puffing so that my own voice might become more calm and well pitched before my husband should arrive home from work.

Almost on tiptoe I walked back to the kitchen to stir the kettle of stew. Why, there was time if I didn't get so rushed to whip up a batch of hot biscuits for our evening meal.

Often on busy days since, the memory of that totally unexpected voice has brought me to my better senses when tempted to crowd too much into a short space of time and energy. The unknown voice was one with an assured, known message of peace and poise.

It could so easily have been harsh and hard with unpleasant comments and a brusque "bawling out" for having stupidly dialed incorrectly in haste. An example was set me which I try to remember when my own phone rings in error. For each of us everyday is the Unknown Voice to someone—the salesgirl who takes our telephoned order, the telegraph boy who calls with a message, the secretary in the doctor's office whom we call the morning the baby is ill.

The quality of our unknown voice may do much to influence the lives of others, hastening or slackening the tempo of another life, inserting either happiness or bitter-

FALL

ness. In these days of the known voices of dread and fear abroad in a world of confusion, it is good to encounter the voice which can accept the routine interruptions with good humor. Since I cannot thank her in person, I can only try to imitate the serenity of that cherished Unknown Voice.

PRAYER

Dear Father, we are grateful that thy voice is always kind, for we remember the love and gentleness with which thou hast heard our requests through prayer. Help us to be kind in our daily contacts and to remember that thy kingdom may be judged in part by how well we represent it through our daily contacts with others. And above all may thy great voice of justice never be unknown to us, but a daily guide. *Amen.*

34. THE CHANGING SEASONS

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Eccl. 3:1-11

"He hath made everything beautiful in his time." (Vs. 11.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

As the leaves turn to brilliant colors and then fall to the ground, the heart sometimes looks back with nostalgia to days that are gone. It may take real effort to turn the mind to look ahead to the numerous activities of fall within the church and community. Today's meditation gives a happy secret to encourage us to live fully each day of the changing seasons.

The Changing Seasons

"Always enjoy the changing seasons. Then you can be sure of finding some current happiness. For the seasons will change inevitably, and there is no use in your wishing they would stay the same."

The relaxed face of the older friend who gave me this advice was proof of its power for good. She had just heard me exclaim, "I dread to face the months ahead. This is not my favorite season."

Many people dislike at least one of the seasons. For some it is a distaste of fall with leaves tumbling to the ground. These people overlook the season's rich coloring.

Others shun winter because of its storms and fitful moods. They forget to look upward to the panorama of sky with its maneuvering clouds.

Even springtime finds those who do not prefer it. Perhaps they face the months without the steps of one they

FALL

have loved and lost, and even the beauty is hard to bear. They are not thinking of the miracle of the dead seed turned into spring's living blossoms.

Summer which spells playtime for so many means hard work for others. Busy in the heat of the day, they are unaware of the sweeping winds of eternity.

One of the few things in this earthly life which is certain is that the seasons will change. If the individual can learn to welcome each changing season, he can be sure of variety and beauty in his everyday living.

When once the heart has realized the possibilities of the changing seasons in nature, it is easier to accept the constant shifting of circumstances in life itself. Having an attitude of welcome and acceptance is one of the surest ways of learning to find happiness in the daily routine.

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, we are grateful for all thy goodness to us in providing variety for our days and our years. Help us to welcome eagerly each of the changing seasons and to be alert to using the time wisely, investing it well in the projects designed to bring thy kingdom to earth and into our own homes. *Amen.*

35. SAYING THANK YOU

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Luke 17:11-19

"And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?" (Vs. 17.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Today's meditation concerns an art which any of us can learn. It is equally effective when practiced on little children or the ones of advanced years. And it is a technique needed in dealing with both men and women. Indeed the learning of it can help us grow in our knowledge of God and the universe itself. Our devotional period today is concerned with the art of saying thank you.

Saying Thank You

Recently the mayor of a city resigned, saying he could no longer afford to give so much time to municipal affairs. To intimate friends he confided, "The phone rang day and night, and ninety-nine calls were against something the city council had done. Perhaps one call in a hundred would be to say thanks."

Worn out with the criticism, the time came when he felt it was no longer worth the physical and nervous strength

FALL

and time from his regular employment to try to serve his city. Yet when he presented his resignation, immediately a plea went up for him to continue "the good job" he was doing.

Speaking of the loss to good government caused by the resignation, a business acquaintance said, "We waited too long to say thank you."

This situation in civic government is duplicated many times over in churches. How often does a congregation rally at the time when a man is about to leave their parish. They realize with a sense of loss how much he has done, or tried to do, for all the members of the church.

In the nice things they say at his farewell reception they echo some of the feelings in their hearts. Mingled with the compliments is a feeling of regret that they have not said and done more during the days of his struggle.

In homes it is the same way. Not until a child goes away to school do parents sometimes realize how much joy and cheer that child has contributed daily, even with problems of discipline and growth. Certainly children never fully appreciate their parents and their parents' problems until they are trying to establish homes of their own and come to understand the demands of a budget, the frictions of earning a living.

In all situations of life, whether community, church, or home, there is one positive technique which can always help. This is the simple art of remembering to say thank

SEVEN NOTES OF GRATITUDE

you for what others are doing to try to help in any given situation.

It is so easy to criticize. One of the marks of the Christian is that he tries to be among those who express gratitude. Did not Jesus himself ask, "But where are the nine?" when the healed lepers, all but one, failed to show gratitude.

PRAYER

We bring our thanks, dear heavenly Father, for all thy great blessings to us, benefits which we often forget to be grateful for in our concern with temporal affairs. Forgive our seeming lack of interest in the daily miracle of sunrise and sunset, the giving of strength to meet each new day, the healing benediction of sleep beneath the security of the stars. Overlook our thoughtlessness and help us to live daily more aware of thee and of the wistful needs of others to be thanked for their contribution to our happiness. *Amen.*

36. SEVEN NOTES OF GRATITUDE

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: II Pet. 1:1-8

"Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord." (Vs. 2.)

FALL

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

An especially busy time for the housewife begins around Thanksgiving when she plans special foods for the dinner and begins holiday activities. Sometimes in the rush of busyness with the hands it is hard to keep track of the attitudes of Thanksgiving which motivate such outer observances. As a tangible means of expressing gratitude for blessings, one housewife took the method of writing Thanksgiving notes, which are described in today's meditation.

Seven Notes of Gratitude

On Thanksgiving evening a year ago I sat down at my desk and sent seven brief notes to friends and acquaintances. Perhaps it was because the date at the top *did* say "Thanksgiving evening" that the friends seemed to cherish them and respond with gratitude.

What were these notes? One went to a couple whose daughter had just been married and who had included us in the list of those to receive her new address. How grateful I was for the joy of having watched this young woman develop from babyhood.

The next note was quite different, involving a woman recently widowed whose husband had done us a kindness. By reminding ourselves and her of this, our gratitude extended into true comfort in sorrow.

SEVEN NOTES OF GRATITUDE

The third was addressed to relatives who had been unable to join the family at dinner. Their presence had been felt through remembrance of past visits—a happy memory.

There was the acknowledgment to a friend who had sent a contribution to be forwarded to a favorite charity. Writing her, I was aware of the value of the institution as well as our friendship.

Another note replied to a committee request for information and service, a reminder of what my community offers in blessings and opportunities.

Then I wanted to put into words my feeling for the dignity and reverence of the gold-and-green Christmas decorations which had gone up already in the leading department store, preparing for holiday joys. And if I did not write the note now, the whole busy season would slip away without the owner's ever knowing my appreciation.

Finally "just for fun" there was the first Christmas note of the season, the mailing of a contribution to an annual party for Indians in the Southwest. This had to be mailed early in order to plan for the feast for the first citizens of our American heritage.

A varied assortment of notes, these seven written on Thanksgiving evening. Yet each brought its acknowledgment with special thanks. Through the year I have had evidence that the time invested in Thanksgiving notes paid rich dividends.

These seven just happened to be the notes written on

FALL

the evening of our national holiday of Thanksgiving, and in every home the notes might be quite different. Yet they may well express a thanksgiving for life itself, as they deal with different facets of it: happiness, sorrow, family, business, welfare, service, pleasure.

Surely there is no quality for which we so need to express thanksgiving as that of the great gift of life, or everyday living.

As I penned each note, there was a little burst of gratefulness in my own heart. The friends wrote back expressing more gratitude for the seven notes of Thanksgiving. And so the aggregate of thankfulness in the world was increased.

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, help us to remember the opportunities which are available to us in the writing of letters to those who will cherish a word from us. May we never become so busy that we neglect this means of service. Accept it as a form of thanksgiving to thee for thy great gifts, including some of our beloved Bible passages originally penned as letters to the early Christians. *Amen.*

37. THE DISPLACED DOLLARS

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Acts 3:1-8

"Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." (Vs. 6.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Near Thanksgiving our minds automatically turn back to that first band of Pilgrims who came to America to establish homes, schools, churches. Sometimes we forget that the procession of pilgrims has continued across the years. Today's meditation brings a story of modern-day pilgrims and how they are becoming citizens of America by serving through church and community, with busy hands and thankful hearts.

The Displaced Dollars

In my purse were five brand-new one-dollar bills. They had been given me by a lawyer friend to take to the five members of the family of displaced persons sponsored by our church.

"I want each member of the family to have a dollar bill

FALL

to do with exactly as he chooses for fun," the friend had said to me.

So now I went to the church office to find the pastor and discover the whereabouts of the family. They lived happily enough in the small house on which church men paid the rent, cooked on a castoff stove, used dishes from the woman's society, and slept on sheets and pillowcases furnished by the businesswomen's circle. The father did janitor work to support his family, which included wife, son, daughter, and the children's grandmother.

Finding the father at work dusting the pews, I wondered how best to give him this contribution. Simply I told him of the anonymous friend who wanted the new family to "have some fun in America."

At first the father seemed about to refuse. But he held the crisp bill to the light and said, "The American dollar. Do you know how so beautiful?" There was a faraway look in his eyes as he continued, "The first time I ever see one, a soldier you call G.I. Joe gave me one to look at the day after they marched into our town. Such a day, they give to my boy his first candy bar. And they give him a nickel, too, which we always keep."

I felt his thrill of pride in the American dollar and its symbol of strength in the world today, backed by generous manhood.

"This money is not to keep, but to spend for fun," I

reminded him. Secretly I wondered what the family would buy in our stores: soap, toys, candy, gum?

Then I left to try to find some books and magazines for the new reading room for young people which our church was helping furnish. My lawyer friend was chairman of this enterprise and wondering how to find enough book-cases.

A few days later the pastor phoned me to say that he had a surprise for opening night of the library and recreation room.

When the night came, my lawyer friend was there inspecting a beautiful bookcase when I arrived. Near a discarded living-room lamp and an old easy chair, the case held inviting books of novels, poetry, history, travel, and the Bible with its summary of all types. On top of the case was a tiny American flag in a wooden standard resting on a little crocheted doily.

When I went closer to examine the needlework, I found the pattern of the horn of plenty fashioned in exquisite tiny stitches. Even as I wondered who had contributed this lovely piece, the janitor approached and said beaming, "Grandma bought a ball of thread and made it. My boy and I, we just got this made in time."

His hand touched the bookcase by which stood my lawyer friend. "Let me introduce the builder," I told him.

"Where did you get the wood?" the lawyer asked, fingering the carved top.

FALL

"I buy," said the father. "A good man sent me some money to use for fun. It has been so long since we can give anything; we can hardly wait to make this for the church. They give to us all the time, and all we can give for so long is trouble, trouble, trouble. Now we have some fun; we give too."

Beside him stood the young son, his hair slicked back except for the unruly lock over his left eye. He made a new effort to push it back as he told me shyly, "I bought the flag with money from my new paper route." His eyes turned toward the far wall where sat the three generations of foreign-born women while their men talked to us. I decided to go and talk to them, getting acquainted with the grandmother and the mother by admiring the pink-cheeked baby.

Thus, from across the way I glanced at my lawyer friend just as he flashed a quick smile at the two newcomers to America. He held out his hand and shook hands with father and son. It was the same gesture he used when welcoming visiting dignitaries to our community, and it was plain to see he was formally welcoming two brand-new citizens. He seemed happy as he looked at the bookcase made with dollar bills designed for "fun" use.

He called the meeting to order, and the group rose to sing "America" and to listen to the pastor give the invocation, seeking the blessing of God on this new room to which so many had contributed.

AN ORANGE FOR CHRISTMAS

PRAYER

God, who guided the Pilgrims, as we remember the blessings which are ours in America, help us also to keep in mind the many refugees who have come to this land of freedom. Help us to reach out welcoming hands, enabling them to integrate into the institutions of liberty established by our founding fathers. Whatever our status as Thanksgiving approaches, may we be grateful for that which we have and use it to thine honor and glory. *Amen.*

38. AN ORANGE FOR CHRISTMAS

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Ps. 96

"Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the Lord glory and strength." (Vs. 7.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Each year along about Christmastime the golden orange appears in our markets. Many of us can remember the thrill of first finding an orange in the toe of our Christmas stocking and the bump it made between the candies and

FALL

small toys. Today's meditation concerns the use which one family makes of the orange as a symbol of God's good gifts at Christmas.

An Orange for Christmas

One of the traditional pleasures of Christmas is the finding of an orange in the toe of a stocking hung on the mantel. As treats at the end of a dinner served in a mission home, or as a remembrance to carry away from a Christmas tree, this fragrant fruit is an enjoyable part of the happy season.

In the parts of the United States where the fruit grows on trees with their shiny green leaves and waxy white blossoms, the ranchers often donate boxes of oranges to orphanages. And there is an unwritten contest among the packing houses to see which firm can be first to ship the golden "ornaments" to the dinner tables of buyers in colder climates.

In the home of one of the growers who loves and shares his fruit with others I learned the story of a special orange for Christmas.

This man makes it a habit to cut and serve an orange at the beginning of each Christmas dinner, giving each member of the table one segment of the fruit. He is carrying out a tradition begun by his pioneer grandmother who

traveled by covered wagon from the Atlantic Ocean through the Midwest, eventually to reach land near the Pacific Ocean. He learned from his aged father the story of the pioneer mother's Christmas their first hard year in the West.

They arrived too late for crops and the money from home failed to come in time for Christmas shopping. A neighbor sent over two large silver dollars for the purchase of food for the Christmas dinner. When it was apportioned at the store for flour, salt pork, beans, there was very little left for a special treat.

For the few coppers in her hand the mother looked around for something she could share with her family. She found one large golden orange at the fruit counter. This she bought and took home and placed on the blue plate which had been carefully carried across the prairies to its new home by the western sea.

When it was time for dinner, she placed the lone orange on the blue plate in the center of the table, and beside it she put the sword which had been her father's in England and which had seen practical use coming across the desert wastelands, chopping firewood.

Then she bowed her head and thanked God for bringing them safely across the miles to a new home, even though far from friends and relatives. She thanked him for the help which had come from strangers so that they might have Christmas dinner. She mentioned the great gift of

FALL

Christmas itself to the hungry heart. And then she asked God to bless the orange which they were all to share as a family.

She cut into the peeling with the cherished heirloom, carefully pulled the sweet segments apart, and passed them on the blue plate from home. Each person had a piece of orange. Three segments were left over, and they, with the peeling, were ground and used to bake a special bread for their supper that night. A crude recipe, the forerunner of the orange breads so popular now in this beautiful home for holiday snacks.

The shared orange helped to make that first Christmas memorable, and next year an orange appeared again at the family table with food prepared from their own garden. Ever afterward it was a part of the pioneer Christmases of that home.

Nor is it forgotten now when the grandson's grown family gathers for a meal whose menu could include any food desired. For this family at Christmas still thanks God for the blessing of a home in freedom, for good neighbors, and for the joy of food shared in family fellowship.

An orange for Christmas is their symbol of gratitude for the rich blessings and gifts of God which surround their lives during the routine days of each year and are most manifest in the great gift of Christmas.

ENJOY EACH CHRISTMAS

PRAYER

So many wonderful gifts are ours, dear heavenly Father, but at Christmas we are most aware of that greatest gift of thy son Jesus. Hear our thanks today for his coming into the world and into our hearts. Help us to extend his loving concern for others to those with whom we come in contact this Christmas season. *Amen.*

39. ENJOY EACH CHRISTMAS

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: Rev. 21:1-7

“And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.” (Vs. 5.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

Sometimes it seems that Christmas comes a little earlier each year. Surely it cannot be time to get ready for Christmas again, but the calendar says that the season for holiday preparations is already here. Today's meditation concerns

FALL

the experience of a woman who determined to enjoy each current Christmas.

Enjoy Each Christmas

"Each year I buy a new holiday corsage," said my friend as she took the holly tied with a red bow and golden bell off her coat lapel.

Since it was nearing the end of the holiday season, she dropped the little lapel ornament into the wastebasket. This seemed to me a shocking waste, and I started to pick it out again.

She laid a restraining arm on my hand and said, "Wait until you hear why I do this." She told me that formerly she had always saved her current Christmas corsage for the next year, putting it carefully away in cotton.

"But somehow it never looked the same," she said.

"One of the silver bells would have come loose or a blue bauble would break."

Then one day it seemed to her that the broken corsage was a symptom of some other things she was carrying over into new Christmases. My friend realized that she was trying subconsciously to cling to the happier past because the current year had had some heartaches and regrets.

Perhaps by such a simple decision as securing a new corsage for each year she would learn how to prepare her

ENJOY EACH CHRISTMAS

heart for the acceptance of the activities of each new Christmas season.

"Usually some charitable organization wanted to sell me one at a bazaar," she told me, "and by clinging to the one from last year, I was not participating in meeting the needs of charity in this new year."

She recalled how a friend had once given her a corsage which she had not worn in favor of the older one, and how by the next year the friend had been gone. So she had seen that she should enjoy the hospitality of friends as this, too, may vary from year to year as circumstances take them to different situations.

"Some things like a corsage are meant to be just transient," said my friend. Recalling the words reminds me that instead of reliving the "good old days," I should make each day, including Christmas, a "good new" one.

PRAYER

Dear heavenly Father, each Christmas comes with its own measure of joys and sorrows. There is great joy in contacting old friends and new, but sadness in marking off from a card list the names of those who have left us within the year. Out of thine abiding love grant to each of us whatever we need most to enable us to live abundantly this current Christmas. *Amen.*

40. THANKS FOR THE BOOK

SCRIPTURE OF THE DAY: John 1:1-14

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (Vs. 14.)

LEADER'S INTRODUCTION

At any time during the year there is enjoyment to be found in the reading of books and new truth eternally in the pages of the Bible. But at the holiday season we are especially aware of this fact because of the number of books which sometimes are included in our gift giving. Today's meditation reminds of the happiness given by books as tokens of friendship. It is an appropriate meditation for the month which includes Universal Bible Sunday as well as the celebration of the birth of Jesus as told in the pages of the Book.

Thanks for the Book

When the Christmas mail begins to arrive, I shall be looking for one special card which for several years now has been sent from Mexico. There will be the gracious phrase

THANKS FOR THE BOOK

"*Feliz Navidad*" to wish us happy holidays. Then there may be again the handwritten addition "*muchas gracias para el libro*" ("many thanks for the book"). Each Christmas the words have come.

Who sends this message, and what is the book? The story is one of the pleasantest reminders of our vacation in Mexico. When my husband and I drove to Mexico City, we made our headquarters in a pleasant tourist home near the beautiful flower market. Assigned to care for our room and serve the meals at our table in the dining room was an energetic young Mexican lad.

It became apparent early in our stay that he was intent upon learning the English language. He would point to a towel as he was hanging it on the rack in our room and shake his head to indicate that he did not know our word for it. When we would say "towel," he would try to repeat the word and something close to "towlee" would come out. With a little practice he would be saying the word almost without a trace of accent. I was sure he was doing better than I in my attempts to repeat phrases after him in Spanish.

He was fascinated by the gadgets on our car when he carried out the luggage for our trips. And always he would be waiting with a smile to open the large gate which enclosed the beautiful garden outside our room when we returned.

When the morning came for us to say "*adios*," my hus-

FALL

band went to the bank for the proper *dinero* for tips, while I browsed in a nearby gift shop for some little token for this boy who had been helpful beyond the call of duty.

Suddenly I remembered the large picture dictionary for children which some of my small friends at home so much enjoyed. Yes, this was available in Mexico in the English edition. There were pictures of birds, animals, toys, houses, cars, schools, churches, and other objects. Beneath each picture was the English word. I had it gift wrapped and handed it to him as he stored our luggage in the car for the return journey.

Never will I forget the look of pleasure which slowly spread over his face as he took off the wrapping. He sat down on the garden wall near the garage and put the book on his knees. With trembling hands he turned the pages, pausing only to look up at us and smile. Then he stared fascinated at the next picture. He thumbed through until he found a picture of a table, such as the one at which we had been sitting when he first served us. He looked up and said, clearly, "Table." He was still on the wall when we drove out; he looked up long enough to wave.

It is for this book that he writes his thanks each year. How many times in my own life have I said, "Thanks for the book." Perhaps it was for a slim volume of poetry on my shelf which arrived one Christmas and which has been referred to often in the years since. Nearby is a book bear-

ing the flyleaf signature of one now gone, beloved because of its reminder of friendship.

A book can awaken the personality of another. When somebody handed me a certain book one holiday saying, "I hope you'll like this, because to me it sounds like you," I looked at the individual with new interest. For he had chosen a subject which long had mattered to me. The fact that he knew the book matched my thinking told me that here was a person who probably knew much about me and was deserving of my interest and concern to see if I understood his tastes half as well. Books often offer a clue to the inner heart of one who gives and so may be the messengers of friendship.

The right choice of a book can recall the past in a way that is both poignant and revealing. How can I ever read again from certain of the English writers without remembering my first glimpse of the white cliffs of Dover with the sunset rays reflecting pink against them and golden lights of the harbor glittering at their base against the soft blue of the sea.

The picking up of a book from the shelf can be like a handclasp recalling a happy meeting. Books of travel and geography remind the reader of those who live in far places but also inhabit the hearth within the heart.

Sometimes the gift of a book will do for one what nothing else can accomplish: give a new direction to living, a fresh incentive to keep trying when the going is hard. Inside the

FALL

pages of a book offered at time of trial or sorrow may be the word of comfort which will enable the one who reads to find some new clue to the way out of his personal dilemma.

And always there is the Bible with its new typesettings, fresh format, innovations in paper and binding, to make it even more adaptable to current usage. And always there is someone within the circle of friends or acquaintances who for special reasons of his own may be grateful for a chance to say, "Thanks for the Book."

PRAYER

Dear God, please accept our thanks anew for the great gift of thy holy word as found in the Bible. We acknowledge with deep gratitude all that it means to us in the varying circumstances of our individual lives. And we give thee in advance this expression of our faith in its power to help us through whatever lies ahead as the heart faces happiness and sorrow in life's changing seasons. *Amen.*

THEOLOGY LIBRARY 158
CLAREMONT, CALIF.

4963



About the author . . .

RUTH C. IKERMAN, a free-lance writer in the field of religious writing, has written articles appearing in religious periodicals of many denominations. From these many published writings she has compiled this new volume and an earlier one, *Devotional Programs for Every Month*. Of this previous book Daniel A. Poling, editor of the *Christian Herald*, said: "One of the church's most popular authors has brought together . . . a book that will increase the usefulness of busy women in church, community, and home."

Mrs. Ikerman received her education at the University of Redlands, Redlands, California. Maintaining her interest in this college, she has addressed their annual Writer's Week on three occasions, speaking about her field of religious writing.

She is also the author of *Prayers of a Homemaker*.